

**Social connections and trust among  
destitute, undocumented African migrants  
in Barcelona, Spain.**

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## **Abstract**

This PhD research is based on a 5 month-long participant observation with a total of 18 undocumented migrants of African origin that were residing at an emergency accommodation in Barcelona, Spain between February and July 2010. Study participants had arrived at this flat, managed by a migrant support association, after their available social networks, on which they depended for shared accommodation arrangements, disbanded under negative pressure caused by the 2008 global economic crisis. They were consequently left without the possibility of relying on familiar support to cope with the effects of the economic recession. In this adverse economic context, it was, therefore, essentially important for them to rebuild their relational support systems, to facilitate their exit from destitution. They could not depend on public supports beyond room and board offered at the emergency accommodation because of their undocumented status. However, in this new life setting, study participants faced the challenge of having to consider relationship opportunities with individuals at the flat or in the community who were previously socially distant, as they did not belong to their tight-knit social networks. The fact that study participants showed marked differences in social connectivity while facing this challenge, stimulated research interest in understanding the reasons behind these differences. The social-ecological paradigm of community psychology was selected as an appropriate theoretical framework to approach this topic, as it draws attention to the multilevel factors that could influence study participants' attitudes towards social connection across ethnic boundaries. Application of participant observation methodology as the core data collection strategy allowed use of complementary methods of data collection as were deemed useful to answer the research questions, like informal conversations with different study participants, a weekly support group with all residents, weekend outings with all who wished to participate and, finally, Focus Group Interviews on the topic of interpersonal trust. The research found that undocumented migrants hold high expectations on trust in their social relationships in response to perceived risk in the transnational context, where they face continuous threats of arrest, detention, and deportation. For this reason, they concentrate their social relationships on available undocumented migrant social networks, which, because members usually belong to the same country of origin, allow them to activate culturally-bound social mechanisms that ensure satisfaction of their high trust expectations. When these networks are no longer available, some undocumented migrants may experience difficulties to adjust their trust expectations as necessary to form relationships with non-network members. However, some display a fundamental willingness to cooperate with others over and above usual trust considerations, which appears to constitute a key personal asset to maintain social connection in crisis situations. This research concludes by outlining the implications of this finding for psychosocial support practice with undocumented migrants and members of other socially vulnerable groups, like refugees and asylum seekers, who could benefit from heightened cooperation to enhance social connectivity in critical situations.

**Keywords:** Undocumented migrant, social connection, social marginalisation, migrant social networks, destitution.

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## **Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION**

This thesis identified the challenge African undocumented migrants faced to maintain social ties in Barcelona, Spain after their available social networks disbanded in the context of the 2008 global economic crisis and seeks to understand the reasons behind differences in social connectivity outcomes among 18 undocumented migrants that were residing at an emergency accommodation in this location.

Prior to their arrival at this emergency accommodation, study participants were being hosted by peers belonging to their established social networks. The maintenance of these accommodation arrangements depended on their ability to abide by cost-sharing agreements. Massive job attrition and difficulties to find new jobs in the underground economy as a result of the 2008 global economic crisis prevented study participants from contributing to household expenses, and, therefore, resulted in their destitution. Since most network members were similarly affected, this situation caused them to scatter in different directions in search of free accommodation options that were available through public shelters and local charities. Consequently, study participants were left without being able to access essential informal support provided by their previously established social networks.

Migrant support association leaders consulted at the outset of fieldwork for this research expressed their concern over the fact that, faced with few social ties in this life setting, a portion of undocumented migrant residents appeared to feel reluctant about establishing new social connections at a moment when they needed them most to cope effectively with the effects of the economic crisis. Some, indeed, appeared quite apathetic at initial observation.

The perceived risk, according to the consulted association leaders, was that those who were more socially withdrawn would gradually become increasingly dependent on humanitarian assistance, for lack of social connections in the community that could help them overcome their situation of destitution. Stays at the emergency accommodation were strictly limited to a 3-month period, which meant that unless they had found a way to live independently during this period, residents would have to transfer to a different emergency accommodation in the Barcelona area, thus, falling into a never ending cycle of dependency.

This is not the life that undocumented migrants aim to achieve when they decide to migrate transnationally to Europe at a risk to their lives. For many, this decision implies the need to transit through several countries and the Saharan desert before reaching the continent's Northern or Western coastline, where all undocumented migrants, regardless of point of origin in Africa, must board fragile and overcrowded dinghies to reach Europe's southern shores. They are willing to take these risks only because of their strong determination to prosper, for their own and families' greater benefit.

With a focus on prevention of worse outcomes, consulted association leaders were, therefore, interested in understanding the nature of observed differences in social connectivity outcomes among undocumented migrants that were admitted to the emergency accommodation. This understanding would allow them to structure their support programme in ways that promote effective social engagement in these critical situations. Research on undocumented migrants in Spain has so far not addressed these kinds of issues. The concerned migrant support association partners with a Social Science Research Group that has undertaken local research projects that examine undocumented migrants' support systems. Other Spanish

researchers have highlighted undocumented migrants' strong dependence on their available social networks. However, this thesis found no local references that had studied undocumented migrants' social behaviour outside of their established social networks. Quite likely, this is because social network fragmentation within these groups was linked to the economic crisis, which had not occurred before in Spain, at least not in a similarly widespread way.

The limited financial support this association received to implement its support programme during the crisis period prevented it from engaging in further research initiatives at this time. They, therefore, welcomed the opportunity to link up with this PhD research project in hopes of being able to shed further light on this particular subject. On a personal level, I had also developed an interest in refugee social connectivity through my previous professional experiences as a psychosocial support aid worker in African refugee and internally displaced people camps. While some refugees/IDP's appeared to remain socially active, others appeared rather socially withdrawn, with differing psychosocial outcomes in each case. It, therefore, seemed highly relevant to gain further insight into the reasons behind these noted differences, in order to inform practice aiming to prevent social isolation among members of vulnerable social groups.

### **1.1. Background**

Spain has changed from a country where out-migration was the norm during the period of Franco's military dictatorship between 1936 and 1975 to a migrant receiving country since becoming a member of the European Union in 1985, eight years after the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1977. As multiple sources highlight, this turnaround became more pronounced during the 1990's. From approximately 241,000 foreign migrants included in the country's 1986 census, (a

mere 0.63% of the overall population) the numbers grew to approximately 5,700,000 foreign migrants by the 2011 census, situating the new percentage of foreign migration with respect to the total population census at 12.2%.<sup>1</sup> This migrant population growth rate has been among the highest in the world. Still, Spain is one of the countries with less net migrant population in the European Union, occupying the 9<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking of European countries in this respect.<sup>2</sup>

Since the year 2000, available reports on migrant arrivals in Spain have noted the growing diversification of migrants in terms of their country of origin. Although a majority of migrants arriving in Spain from this year onwards were from the European Union, this tendency had decreased considerably by 2011. Meanwhile the number of non-European migrants followed an inverse tendency. In relation to African migration, which this research focuses on, the ethnic community of African origin that most grew in numbers was the Moroccan community, from approximately 190,000 in 1998 to 766,000 in 2011. The only noted decrease in Spain's migrant population occurred precisely during the period of this study between 2010 and 2011 due to the effects of the 2008 global economic crisis on the Spanish economy.

Over the preceding decades and in response to the increasing number of non-European migrants seeking to settle in Spain, successive Spanish governments have developed different plans to manage this new social phenomenon. Critics have noted that constant shifts in governmental immigration policies, which appear to be mainly guided to suit electoral calculations, have resulted in mismanagement of the migratory phenomena. Consequently, even though the larger portion of non EU migrants is legally-established in the country, members of certain ethnic communities do not enjoy a high level of integration in Spain and governments are

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Statistics of Spain, 2011. [www.ine.es/en/welcome](http://www.ine.es/en/welcome)

<sup>2</sup> An analysis of immigration in Spain, Karina Noguera, 15/04/2010 in Coyuntura Económica.

not drawing all the potential benefit they can from the population's increased ethnic diversity.

Migrants must continually undertake rather lengthy and demanding bureaucratic procedures to maintain their legal status in country. At these moments, they must coordinate with their employers to take leave, often at their own expense. It is especially important for migrants to show they are in possession of a work contract at the time of application, since resident permits are only issued on condition the applicant is securely employed. Applications for family reunification are usually rejected. When migrants are able to bring their children, there are concerns in certain ethnic communities about lack of resources to mainstream them into the Spanish school system. Many public services still lack adequate language translating services, which results in many immigrants having a difficult time when they access these services.

Critics have also signalled the strong influence of European Union Immigration Policies behind these highly restrictive Spanish government policies in relation to non EU migrants. Basically, they highlight the fact that despite the small proportion of non EU migrants Spain has with respect to the autochthonous population, when compared to other European countries, Spanish governments have traditionally dealt with this phenomenon as if Spain were a country among those that had the highest volume of non EU migrants. Quite evidently, this seemingly disproportionate response raises concerns among critics that Spanish immigration policy is, actually, being driven by the European Union, based on worries expressed by European partners regarding the growing number of migrants from developing countries entering Spain only to reach European countries further north. From this

perspective, Spain appears to have been assigned the role by the EU of monitoring Europe's southernmost border.

#### **1.1.1. African migration to Spain**

Since the thesis looks at African undocumented migrants in particular, some preliminary observations regarding the impact of Spanish immigration policies on African migration are in order. A noted fact in this regard is that Spanish governments have traditionally maintained a particularly stringent application of immigration policy in relation to African applicants to migration. Basically, what this means in practice is that few travel visas of any type are ever issued to African candidates through Spain's embassies, consulates or diplomatic representative offices in their countries of origin. Faced with these restrictions on travel, Africans wishing to migrate to Spain are left with no other option than to risk their lives by taking a sometimes lengthy and always perilous journey to cross Spain's southern border inadvertently. This trip forcibly entails linking up with migrant traffickers who facilitate passage on fragile and overcrowded dinghies to reach either the Spanish Canary Islands or any other point along the southern rim of the Spanish peninsula in exchange for high sums of money.

For those who might be successful in their attempt to reach Spain without mandatory visas and who, therefore, lack legal resident permits once they are on Spanish soil, Spanish governments have developed policies that discourage potential employers from hiring them, by subjecting them to heavy fines and even the possibility of closing their business if caught during a work inspection. Undocumented migrants are also prevented from signing up to the register of inhabitants in the localities where they live. Without a verifiable home address, they are then not entitled to receive support through public services like health and social

care except on an emergency basis. They are neither able to open a bank account, which obliges them to carry all the money they have on them all the time. Due to this legal “limbo” undocumented migrants are forced to accept low skilled and poorly paid jobs demanding long hours of work in often unsafe conditions that pose a high risk to their health.

The situation as far as undocumented migrants from Africa are concerned is ambiguous. A large majority of undocumented migrants coming from African countries have been intercepted while at sea by Spanish coastal guards and transferred to migrant detention centres immediately upon setting foot on Spanish soil. The current Spanish immigration law stipulates that detention periods in cases where individuals have been arrested while trying to access Spanish territory without mandatory visas cannot exceed a 60-day limit (up from 40).<sup>3</sup> Perhaps because they have got rid of their passports before boarding the dinghies in order to not reveal their national identity to border guards, which may then result in their immediate deportation, or because the immigration judge is unable to examine the high volume of cases within this limited period, most undocumented migrants are then released to Spanish territory without any official document that proves authorisation to stay in Spain.

As was widely published through local media channels, the local government of the Community of the Canary Islands of Spain, which had to manage the arrival of 36,000 undocumented migrants in 2006 alone, was, actually, placing them on flights to Madrid and other major Spanish cities on the peninsula, as it felt its response capacity was exceeded. However, in parallel to this procedure, Spanish governments have also developed a migrant deportation programme, with strong

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<sup>3</sup> Organic Law 4/2000, 11 of January, on rights and freedoms of foreigners in Spain and their social integration.



impressions that African undocumented migrants are more often targeted than non EU migrants from any other nationality in similar legal situation. For this reason, even though they have been unofficially granted access to the Spanish territory, undocumented migrants of African origin spare no efforts to avoid being stopped by police during routine identity checks, as this would imply immediate arrest, another detention period up to 60 days while their case is being examined by a judge and possible deportation at the conclusion of this period.

Most frequently, unless the arrested migrants have been involved in criminal activity, they are released once again, for similar reasons. Undocumented migrants can be re-arrested time and time again, during police raids or individually, (there was one reported case in the news of 130 arrests), which makes them feel they are caught in a revolving door. What to make out of this seeming incongruence with respect to government policies towards undocumented migrants? Various different critics of Spanish immigration policies signal that mixed messages with regards to the application of the immigration law, where, on one hand, a certain number of individuals are admitted unofficially to the territory but at the same time might be chased, is maintained as it represents a higher advantage to the Spanish economy.

Undocumented migrants will always be allowed access to Spain as long as they are needed to cover jobs in sectors like agriculture, construction, factories, and services that are vital to the Spanish economy but experience shortage in demand for jobs by local workers, given low wages offered and hard working conditions. Undocumented migrants otherwise represent no expense to the public treasury, since they can be denied the same benefits that local workers require. Police arrests are mainly intended to remind them that they have no rights in Spain and if they

claim them, they might be subject to deportation, which is the last thing a migrant who has made the kinds of sacrifices they have made wants to see happen.

In order to dispel the high level of uncertainty that surrounds their legal situation, undocumented migrants also spare no efforts to obtain legal documents. They access pro-bono lawyers through worker unions in efforts to present a valid claim, which is often delayed indefinitely once submitted to immigration authorities. They are also supported by local platforms that advocate for changes in the immigration law to permit all migrants access to legal resident permits. The smaller portion that is able to obtain an offer for a legal work contract from a local employer does eventually usually obtain the desired permit. Most, however, have to wait and see whether the Spanish government decides to launch a massive undocumented migrant regularisation campaign, as has occurred on numerous occasions over the last couple of decades in attempts to curtail the negative social effects of having a high number of undocumented migrants deprived of their basic rights in Spain.

Currently, the largest African communities in Spain, aside from the Moroccan community, which continues to be the largest ethnic community of African origin settled in Spain, are the Senegalese, Nigerian, and Gambian communities. Most other Sub Saharan Africans come from West African countries, with a growing population of Ghanaians. According to cited sources, in 1998 there were 36,000 migrants in Spain who had been born in Sub Saharan Africa. By 2010, when this study took place, the figure had jumped to 237,000. This dramatic demographic change with respect to migrants of African origin is mainly attributed to the boom in Spain's construction sector at the turn of last century, which leaned heavily on cheap labour. Exact figures concerning the distribution of African migrants in relation to their legal status in Spain are currently unavailable. A rough estimate of the total

undocumented migrant population in Spain including all nationalities situates the figure between 1 and 1.5 million (depending on which political party is making the estimate).

As commonly occurs, international migrants usually head to those country areas where economic activity is most dynamic. A majority of African migrants in Spain, therefore, sought to make a living in the communities of Madrid, Catalonia, Andalusia, or Valencia. With 27% of the Sub Saharan migrant population in 2010, Catalonia was the community that had the highest percentage of Sub Saharan Africans when this research took place.

### **1.1.2. Major factors propelling African irregular migration**

When one considers the extremely difficult journey that African migrants without visas undertake to reach Europe, it seems important to gather preliminary information on the motivations that drive so many to take these risky pathways. Whether they are able to access dinghies off their country's coastline, as in the case of nationals from countries like Senegal, Mauritania, Morocco, and Libya, or first need to carry out an overland trip transiting through many different countries and even the Sahara desert before reaching the dinghy's launching point, the outcome could not be more uncertain. Many perish in the attempt, although exact numbers are still unknown. What is presumed is that many more die than those who make it.

Those who do reach their intended destination are, by all accounts, marked by the experience. Undocumented African migrants have published personal accounts and given television and newspaper interviews in which they report having endured extreme life experiences while traveling, like theft of all their belongings by roadside bandits, exploitation by employers in transit countries, prolonged confinement in

detention centres, witnessing others die, prolonged hunger and thirst, to name a few commonly reported experiences. Overland journeys through Western and Northern African countries usually last for years, during which migrants may be forced to accept substandard housing in marginal areas of town and may not be able to address their health concerns appropriately.

An obvious, historical driver of international migration is the desire to improve one's economic wellbeing, regardless of income level in country of origin. Those who might be more financially secure may still wish to increase their income level and recognise that other countries offer them better opportunities to achieve this improvement. Those who struggle to meet their basic needs may find that migrating internationally is the only solution to escape poverty. Various migrant observers focused on the African continent have highlighted a diversity of trends within African migration patterns.

There are, evidently, African migrants who have earned academic qualifications and training in specific trades, who may have even held a small business in home country, and who at some point decide to improve their income level by accessing better income generating opportunities in Europe. They have built enough savings to pay the high cost of the journey to Europe and may have social contacts at their intended destination. On the other hand, there are those who may come from their countries' rural areas, who may have endured a bad harvest, or who may have difficulty paying a marriage dowry, or may even not wish to live the life of a peasant, and who, therefore, decide to migrate, knowing that if they stay, they will likely encounter constant difficulties to meet their basic needs. Although they may not have enough savings to pay the trip, they can rely on the financial contribution of

their families, extended family and neighbours, or even obtain loans from individuals who specialise in migration loans.

A consistent theme that has been highlighted in the migration literature is the motivation international migrants feel to improve their families' wellbeing, regardless of their previous income level. This theme certainly applies to African migrants. A majority express that the main purpose for migrating is to help their families back home. It's not even a matter of choice but, rather, a culturally-influenced social obligation. It would bring shame on them to not live up to cultural expectations placed on male youth to improve their families' welfare if opportunities to do so are within reach. They want their families and entire community to be proud of them. As mentioned earlier, in many instances, the migration project is not an individual initiative but a whole family project, which binds migrants to the idea of migrating not only for their own benefit but for their family's and even community's benefit as well.

Another important theme concerns migrants' expectations of success based on the observed positive results obtained by other migrants from their community of origin that have gone before them. Migrants who have reached their intended destination point in Europe send remittances to their families who are, therefore, able to invest in home improvements and other purchases they were unable to engage in prior to their family member's international migration. When these migrants return home from abroad, they show outward signs of wealth and talk favourably about the possibility of finding much better paid jobs in Europe. They noticeably earn the community's respect; before they migrated, they were involved in the same menial jobs that those who have still not migrated have to do. All these factors make those who have still not migrated feel more encouraged to take this step. When many community members have travelled abroad, every family wants

his child to migrate internationally. If visas are not available, the dinghy is the only solution.

A growing body of literature underscores the importance of migrants' social networks, both in country of origin and at destination point in the transnational context to facilitate international migration. Migrants, according to this perspective, move not only based on economic factors but because they have family members or trusted friends on each end that make international migration desirable and feasible. These close contacts play a crucial role to ensure that the necessary logistics are in place to make the journey and settlement into the new country successful. They might provide a portion of the necessary funding and coordinate with migrants during their journey when serious problems arise. Those network contacts that are located at destination points house them upon arrival and provide initial orientation towards available jobs. Without these contacts, many migrants would not take this important step or succeed even if they did. In all likelihood, the process would be much harder than it already is.

On the other end of the spectrum, Spain's burgeoning construction sector in the 1990's and for a good part of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, attracted high numbers of international migrants. Local employers eager to form a cheap labour force were willing to hire them while the government turned a blind eye. As the local economy grew stronger and local workers lost interest in manual labour jobs, other sectors of economic activity became accessible to international migrants as well. Many African youth are also passionate about football and are familiar with European teams in the major football leagues. As several major teams have recruited African players, many of them aspire to have their chance to be recognised by football team scouts, which is another important factor impelling many African

young migrants to choose Europe as their destination. The possibility of finding a job upon arrival in different sectors made many African youth consider that this might be the moment to make their dreams come true.

### **1.1.3. Impacts of the 2008 global economic crisis in Spain**

Within Europe, Spain was one of the most severely affected countries by the 2008 global economic crisis. Inability to repay acquired credit or obtain new credit from local banks led to numerous business foreclosures or drastic downsizing of work forces, with a consequent spike in unemployment rates. Without a regular income, many workers were unable to keep up with their home mortgage payments and, therefore, were obliged to surrender their home. Even when mortgage payers had nowhere else to go, they were evicted by force. Local city and town councils were strapped for funds and, consequently, exceeded by the volume of demand for assistance. While the Spanish government studied the possibility of requesting a rescue package from the European Union, prospects of economic recovery in the mid-term were dismal.

As usually occurs in situations of generalised social crisis, the most vulnerable members of society are the most affected. Migrants, and especially undocumented migrants, fall in this category. As part of its new austerity plan, the Spanish government initiated a migrant return scheme to encourage legally-established migrants from any non-European nationality to return to their country of origin and receive their unemployment benefits there; 40% before departure from Spain and the remaining 60% at the Spanish embassy or consulate in their country of origin. Participation in this programme, which was partially funded by the European Return

Fund, came with the requirement to not return to Spain before 3 years.<sup>4</sup> Most legally-established migrants did not participate in this programme but some still returned to home country in the expectation of being able to live more cheaply on their unemployment cheques. Others moved to other European countries wherever they had a contact that could link them up with a job, as their legal resident permits allowed them to.

Undocumented migrants were particularly affected by the fact that, in many instances, they depended on legally-established members of their established social networks for their living arrangements and other necessary supports. When these important social contacts had to surrender their homes due to inability to make mortgage payments, those who lacked legal documents became effectively homeless. There were no other social contacts available that could offer them alternative accommodation since they were all, more or less, facing the same situation. In some instances, although their legally-established social contacts were able to maintain their home property, undocumented migrants of African origin became homeless anyway, since after losing their jobs they were not able to contribute financially to household expenses, according to cost-sharing agreements.

Many African undocumented migrants caught in this situation had little familiarity with the wider context, either because they had primarily moved within their own ethnic peer networks since arrival in country or had only recently arrived in Spain. They, therefore, did not know where to turn to for basics such as food and shelter. Many slept in the outdoors, in parks, cash withdrawal booths or abandoned vehicles. They spent their entire day moving around, in search for solutions to their penury.

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<sup>4</sup> Programas de retorno voluntario de inmigrantes: Gobierno de España, Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, Secretaría General de Inmigración y Emigración.



Many picked up metal scraps on the street and sold them to metal dealers. Eventually, they found out about public diners operated by the city council or private charities, usually linked to the Catholic Church. They also found out about public emergency accommodations, some which were run by local migrant support associations and which were, therefore, exclusively devoted to migrant applicants.

Undocumented migrants had little chance of finding new employment in this crisis situation. In a climate of increased competition for scarcely available jobs, many locals and legally-established migrants turned to jobs in the underground economy that under normal circumstances they would refuse, thus, depriving undocumented migrants of an essential source of income. As the crisis situation persisted, African undocumented migrants were unable to honour their financial commitments towards their families and creditors back home, which became a major source of anxiety for them. Families could interpret this the wrong day and cause them to fall into disgrace. To compound their problems, they now faced increased risk of arrest and deportation, as the Spanish government undertook a series of measures to discourage further undocumented migrant arrivals from the African region.

Return home in this situation was not an acceptable option for most undocumented migrants of African origin. A major reason could be that they did not have enough savings to pay back loans contracted to fund their migration journey. To return home would also signal the failure of their migratory project, in which they and their entire families had invested all their hopes for a better future, at a cost of significant personal sacrifice. This move would, inevitably, bring shame on themselves and on their entire family. They, therefore, felt stuck between a country that they could not return to and a country that was not willing to integrate them. In

the meantime, they lacked the possibility of leaning on members of their ethnic groups that by now had scattered in all directions. In the resulting situation of utter uncertainty they were caught in, all they could do was to cling to basic food and shelter assistance provided by local charities.

## **1.2. Definition of research problem**

### **1.2.1. Personal experiences**

As a Barcelona-based psychosocial support practitioner focused on victims of human rights abuses across different cultures, I became concerned about the psychosocial impact of loss of essential relational support structures in African undocumented migrants' lives consequent to the 2008 global economic crisis. Although I had never previously worked with members of these social groups, I had worked in numerous post-conflict contexts on the African continent, including DRC, both Sudans, CAR, Liberia, and Guinea (Conakry) and was, therefore, well aware of the emphasis that members from African societies place on maintaining family and community ties. My personal observations in different African contexts confirm research findings (Miller & Rasco, 2004) highlighting the fact that in African societies, most members draw their sense of psychosocial wellbeing from their interpersonal contacts and participation in community life.

At the same time I was aware of the fact that undocumented migrants could not expect much in the way of public support at this time. It was certainly not the moment when government policy makers would envision policy modifications to enhance undocumented migrants' social integration. The local population was growing increasingly uneasy about the presence of migrant groups, based on concerns that their presence strains the local economy in different ways. Until this point, and as any local person could easily perceive, undocumented migrants of

African origin lived quite marginally within their ethnic social networks, keeping the lowest profile possible to avoid arrest and working long hours to be able to send remittances to their families, so, they had few if any established links with potentially useful community supports in this situation.

In light of the extremely precarious life situation that grew out of the economic crisis for many African undocumented migrants, and the threat this posed to their psychosocial wellbeing, I became interested in learning about how different members of these social groups were coping with this highly adverse situation. Experiences such as these may result in further social isolation, which is now widely acknowledged as a major contributing factor to poor health outcomes. After losing their established social references, undocumented migrants, and especially those who have little experience in context, may become totally disoriented, confused, and upset. They may feel that no one cares about them, making them feel worthless and fearful of others. In order to protect themselves, they may grow increasingly distrustful and unable to engage in social contact even when support is offered to them. This was certainly my experience while working in refugee and internally displaced people camps in Guinea, DRC, and Sudan. Some refugees were indeed reluctant to engage in meaningful social contact and were, consequently, harder to reach despite the high value placed on social relationships in African cultures.

Members of undocumented migrant groups are certainly hard to reach. For one, they do not identify themselves as undocumented, especially not to locals, out of security concerns. Nevertheless, it appeared as though in their adverse social situation they might be easier to engage with since they lacked usual recourse to contacts within their ethnic groups for essential supports. It also seemed important to try and make this link at a moment when undocumented migrants from certain

geographical areas might be suffering the backlash of Spain's failed economic policies. These situations usually give rise to public discourses that blame migrants with scarce economic means for everything that has gone wrong in the country. The question was how to approach members of these groups to explore these kinds of issues?

### **1.2.2. ACISI/CEPAIM EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION**

Through a social contact that works for a local migrant support association in Barcelona, I was able to enter into contact with undocumented African young males who were lodging at an emergency accommodation this association operates in one of the city's medieval quarters. They had all lost their established living arrangements with peer network members when their social networks fragmented under pressure caused by the 2008 global economic crisis. The association's limited budget only allowed it to offer them room and board on a strictly 3-month basis, after which they had to be transferred to a different area shelter for homeless people unless they had found alternative living arrangements before then. As usually occurs when access to a potential research site requires preliminary negotiations with site gatekeepers, it was first necessary to discuss with the association's leaders how a research project in this context could be valuable to the migrants, the association, and to the wider support system.

A major concern expressed by consulted stakeholders in relation to undocumented migrants of African origin who arrived at their emergency accommodation was that, since their previously established social networks were already small to begin with, when these networks disintegrated under pressure caused by the economic crisis, many were left with no trusted contacts. It also became difficult for them to be reabsorbed by a different social network since most

migrant networks had taken a similar path. This situation meant that unless they found a way to rebuild their social networks, they might become increasingly dependent on humanitarian assistance. They would be obliged to continually transfer to available emergency accommodations and lead a rather institutionalised life, which is not what they had migrated for. From their perspective, it was, therefore, crucially important that emergency accommodation residents maintain an adequate level of social connectivity.

However, in their daily interactions with residents at this large, first floor flat these administrators had perceived that not all residents readily engaged in social contact. While some appeared inclined to readily engage in social contact, others appeared far more reluctant in this sense. This variation was puzzling for them since, from their perspective, all of them should be actively making new contacts in order to find an exit to the emergency accommodation as soon as possible. Which grown up would want to live in an overcrowded emergency accommodation with total strangers for an extended period, having to abide by house rules all the time? The association had even established a daily timetable that required residents to leave the flat in the morning after breakfast and not return until lunch time at noon. This structure was intended to encourage them to be out in the community making new links.

Consequently, association administrators felt it would be interesting to understand the nature of observed differences in social connectivity, in case they could be doing something differently to help residents, especially the younger and more inexperienced ones, intensify their social connections in this life setting. This expressed interest resonated with a similar question I had had in relation to refugees and displaced people while working in different refugee/IDP camps. Quite clearly,

because any formal support provided by different aid agencies in these contexts fell short of absolute requirements, it was crucially important for members of these uprooted populations to link up with others to receive as much informal (refugee-based) support as was available.

However, what I noted was considerable variation in terms of individuals' inclination to engage in relationship with others while caught in these adverse circumstances; while a portion appeared to be 'mixing' rather consistently, and even responded to staff recruitment calls made by different aid agencies, another portion seemed to remain on the margins, with noticeably different psychosocial outcomes in each case. Since, ultimately, these diverse responses were reflected in patterns of service utilization, with some growing more dependent on aid agencies than others and, consequently, experiencing further distress when the aid agencies finally exited the context, I felt it would be interesting to understand the nature of these differences. So far, I had worked primarily within a therapeutic framework, which limited possibilities to address wider social factors. I was, therefore, less familiar with the concept of resilience and thought that exploring this concept in depth might help clarify this type of question.

The opportunity to look at factors underpinning variation in social connectivity in the context of this PhD research provided a means to explore this concept in some depth. While there is currently substantial information on factors affecting refugee mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, including factors affecting the social dimension of their experience, there is far less information available on undocumented migrants' psychosocial wellbeing in European contexts, perhaps as a reflection of their marginal status in society.

This information is necessary at a moment when there are calls for a common European policy in regards to basic health coverage that member states should provide to irregular migrants. Frontex, the European border agency, estimates the number of irregular migrant entries into the European Union at a record high of 270,000 in 2014 alone. Migrant traffickers continually devise new ways to circumvent border controls, placing undocumented migrants in extreme danger, all which gives a sense of the magnitude of the current problem. New policies intended to facilitate undocumented migrant access to health and social services, will, therefore, require that providers of health and psychosocial support to members of these vulnerable groups are able to offer holistic and contextualised responses.

### **1.3. Aims of the project**

This PhD thesis principally aims to find an explanation for observed differences in undocumented migrant social connectivity amongst 18 undocumented migrants of African origin residing at an emergency accommodation in Barcelona, Spain in 2010.

The research takes as its starting point the precarious situation in which the selected study group of undocumented migrants of African origin was found at the time of this research and highlights the threat this posed to their psychosocial wellbeing. At a moment when their few supports were no longer available, it was, therefore, assumed that restoring their social networks was highly relevant, as a crucial stabilising factor. They could not count on public supports, given their undocumented status.

Although this issue was highlighted by the association leaders that operated the emergency accommodation, it was also assumed to be relevant for the African undocumented migrants that were residing at the emergency accommodation, given

the high value Africans traditionally place on interpersonal contact and community participation. The topic sparked personal research interest based on previous observations and a perception regarding refugee and internally displaced people's varying attitudes towards social connection in the midst of dire life circumstances.

Greater understanding about these issues is expected to contribute to extend the body of knowledge concerning appropriate ways to foster social linkage among individuals who depend largely on social relationships to cope with and overcome crisis situations, in absence of or limited public supports. There is a perceivable need to advance knowledge on deeper issues and challenges that result from experiences of uprootedness and relocation as the undocumented migrants that took part in this study were undergoing at the time of this research.

The specific questions this thesis seeks to answer are, therefore:

Main research question:

How can variations in social connectivity amongst undocumented migrants in Barcelona be explained?

Sub questions:

- Which internal and external factors hinder undocumented migrants' capacity to form and maintain social connections?
- Which factors internal and external facilitate social connections?

#### **1.4. Theoretical framework**

The thesis identified, reviewed, and discussed a number of available psychosocial wellbeing and integration frameworks in the available literature that could provide useful theoretical guidance to conduct this research. The



Psychosocial Working Group has formulated a psychosocial wellbeing framework which defines three core domains of psychosocial wellbeing, comprising Human Capacity, Social Ecology, & Culture and Values. As defined in this available framework, psychosocial wellbeing results from the available human, social, and cultural capital that people can draw upon within each of these interconnected domains while responding to the challenges posed by prevailing events and conditions. Certain domains may contain fewer resources than others and, therefore, provoke imbalances that cause distress.

This research project focuses particular attention on the domain of undocumented migrants' social ecology, assessing that under the selected study group's current circumstances, it was important to consider their available resources in this critical domain to understand their varying social responses. Further theoretical guidance on an individual's social ecology was provided by an integration framework developed by Ager & Strang (2004), which defines the different types of social connections that migrants and refugees require in order to access essential supports for their personal wellbeing. Based on social capital theory, as formulated by Putnam, (1993) these authors define social bridges (comprising contacts within the local population), social bonds (comprising same-ethnic contacts), and social links (comprising contacts with institutions and services) as the three major categories of social connection through which migrants and refugees can access markers of integration, (human rights) like housing, employment, and education.

As this integration framework also indicates, immigrants and refugees require a series of facilitators to establish social links, such as language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability. However, in order to access these facilitators, they must first be able to access their basic rights to exercise citizenship. Basic

rights are, precisely, what undocumented migrants do not have access to. In this situation, they have no choice but to remain confined to their small, ethnic group based social network, which limit their capacity to expand their social networks as required to achieve markers of integration. If these networks disband, they may be left stranded and in need of emergency humanitarian assistance.

These initial theoretical perspectives led to consideration of the ecological paradigm of community psychology that underpins them, for further orientation. The whole systems thinking approach espoused by the ecological paradigm appears particularly suited to examine variation in social connectivity, and, therefore, is the core theoretical framework that guides this research. Its value resides in its consideration of key elements situated at different levels, both within the individual and in the environment, and their ongoing interaction, to clarify individual outcomes. These elements may constitute risk or protective factors for the specific individual, thus, implying that different individuals will vary in their responses to certain events based on the availability of key balancing factors in their lives.

### **1.5. Brief description of methodology**

Fieldwork to document the questions this thesis set out to answer was conducted at the emergency accommodation in Barcelona where the selected study group of undocumented migrants of African origin were residing at the time of this research. Through a participative process involving the association leaders, and given the mainly qualitative nature of the information required to inform the research questions, it was decided to implement a participant observation over a period of 5 months as the core data collection method. This approach accords itself with the ecological paradigm that underpins this research.

For administrative staff, this approach held the advantage of being able to use my professional background in psychosocial support to African refugees and IDP's to facilitate social connections within this study group while collecting relevant data. This dual practitioner-researcher role was the kind of less intrusive, more observational and interactive approach to research they considered adequate to gain potential participants' trust, as they might otherwise feel rather suspicious about the purpose of the research. Once trust between researcher and those being researched was established by way of this flexible approach, other useful research methods to collect necessary data could be considered. These suggestions deserved consideration, in anticipation of encountering significant resistance to participate if study group members perceived that the sole interest of the relationship was to provide the researcher with requested information.

All residents provided their signed consent to participate in this research after receiving oral and written information in Spanish and English regarding the nature of this research and the risks and benefits associated to their participation. After an initial period of trust building through regular visits to the emergency accommodation, it became possible to intensify contacts with residents by involving them in a series of group-oriented support activities, like weekly Support Groups and weekend Group Outings, which provided complementary avenues to gather further insight into key factors influencing their ability to form social connections. Finally, a series of Focus Group Interviews on the topic of trust and the implementation of a Propensity to Trust scale to thirteen participants provided further necessary insights to reach the final conclusions of the thesis.

## 1.6. Overview of the thesis

At the conclusion of this introduction chapter, this thesis proceeds to present the findings of a literature review that initially explored a series of existing theoretical frameworks through which it is possible to conceptualise psychosocial wellbeing. As these frameworks reflect, psychosocial wellbeing is contingent on different overlapping dimensions, of which social connection is consistently highlighted as a crucial contributing factor. On the basis of this preliminary exploration, the literature review then identifies links between these theoretical positions and the ecological paradigm of community psychology, which is, therefore, examined in detail for further relevant theoretical insight. This paradigm is then contrasted with the mental health (medical) model that has been applied in post-conflict and refugee resettlement countries to address the psychological consequences of exposure to extreme life events, as an alternative conceptual position that might be relevant in the context of this research.

After making these comparisons, the systemic orientation of the ecological paradigm of community psychology is identified as the most suitable theoretical framework to explore the defined research topic, given the combined macro, meso, and micro level factors that could have a strong influence on social connectivity within study participants' current life setting. This theoretical orientation's narrow link with prevention science allows potentially relevant factors to be framed in terms of *risk and protective factors* and then analyse them from the perspective of diverse theoretical contributions. The literature review identifies undocumented migrant networks as an essential protective factor despite their limitations. This part of the discussion enables final framing of the main research question and sub questions that this thesis will seek to answer.

The third chapter, devoted to explain this thesis' chosen methodology, outlines the specific research methods that were found to be most compatible for conducting this research, both in terms of the adopted theoretical framework and the specific requirements of the research setting. It explains how the decision was reached to implement a participant observation as a neutral and flexible first line approach to the study group, in consideration of the emotional instability they were going through after this unexpected shift in their life circumstances. The chapter then explains how complementary research activities that appeared appropriate to gather more in-depth information were integrated as the participant observation continued and trust between researcher and study participants was established.

The fourth chapter presents an initial set of findings concerning background factors in the study group's migratory experiences that appeared to be highly relevant for an understanding of the chosen research topic. This chapter aims to reconstruct undocumented migrant trajectories since the point of departure in home country for what these experiences might reveal that helps clarify their attitudes towards social engagement in the transnational context. For this purpose, the chapter displays findings regarding important cultural factors in country of origin that influence decisions to migrate transnationally, the characteristics of the overland and sea crossing that undocumented migrants from African countries undertake, and their initial experiences upon arrival in the new cultural setting. The crucial importance of available social networks throughout the entire process is underscored.

The fifth chapter focuses on specific findings regarding internal and external risk and protective factors in study participants' lives. It first outlines and discusses a series of obvious hurdles that could, potentially, stifle study participants' ability to

form new social connections in their current life setting. Alongside these hurdles, the chapter lists and discusses a number of identified primary and secondary social resources in their immediate surroundings that could act as effective protective factors. Against this backdrop, the chapter then discusses the potential risk factors deriving from undocumented migrants' accumulated social experiences that might be preventing them from engaging with protective resources required to overcome identified hurdles towards social connection. After this, the personal assets that are implicit in certain study participants' willingness to link up with available social resources are identified and discussed.

The last set of findings contained in the fifth chapter concerns, on one hand, the results of the administration of the Propensity to Trust Survey to thirteen study participants that consented to participate in this research activity, which are discussed in necessary detail, and the findings regarding local stakeholders' perspectives on the issues being considered. This chapter closes with a discussion on researcher reflexivity.

The sixth chapter brings together major themes emerging from the findings and relates these back to the specific questions this research seeks to answer. This discussion clarifies the strong emphasis that undocumented migrants place on trust in their social relationships, given their enduring vulnerability in the transnational context. Trust appears, indeed, as a critical influencing variable in study participants' dispositional willingness to form new social connections in their current life setting.

Insights gained through a focus on trust in relation to the selected study group provide the basis to discuss the contribution of this research towards a broader understanding of key factors influencing undocumented migrants' psychosocial

wellbeing in the conclusions chapter. This final chapter includes a discussion of the implications of these findings for psychosocial support practice, the limitations of this thesis, and possible avenues for further research.

## Chapter 2 – Literature review

The previous chapter highlighted the unexpected fragmentation of undocumented migrants' social networks caused by the 2008 global economic crisis as a matter of particular concern for psychosocial support providers that are actively involved in international migration and related issues. The possibility of accessing informal social support through involvement in migrant social networks is, by all evidence, crucial for undocumented migrant social adjustment, as members of these social groups are denied access to public supports because of their lack of legal resident permits. After losing these vital reference points in the context of the economic recession, and with no possibility of benefiting from family reunification schemes, undocumented migrants faced increased challenges, which suggested that reconstituting their social networks promptly was important to navigate difficulties associated with this period.

However, as noted by local observers focused on undocumented migrant issues, members of these social groups responded to this need in various ways. The fact that some undocumented migrants appeared socially withdrawn at a moment when social links appeared crucial, even within their respective ethnic communities, stimulated research interest to understand the reasons behind differences in social engagement patterns displayed among undocumented migrants in need of social connections.

In this chapter I, therefore, begin by defining the concept of *social connectedness* for its value to understand the importance of social connectivity in the context of international migration. I then review a number of broader theoretical and conceptual frameworks to determine the most suitable theoretical approach to



understand the wider range of issues potentially affecting undocumented migrant social connectedness. This exploration concludes with the selection of the *Social-Ecological paradigm of Community Psychology* as a suitable overarching theoretical framework due to its holistic orientation. Complementary selection of psychosocial wellbeing and refugee integration conceptual frameworks provide a broader basis to consider specific variables. These theoretical choices permit the final formulation of research questions this thesis seeks to answer in relation to variation in undocumented migrant social engagement.

## **2.1. Defining social connectedness**

Social connectedness is defined as the affective experience of belonging and relatedness between people, (Van Bel, D.T., Smolders, K.C.H.J., IJsselsteijn, W.A. & De Kort, Y.A.W, 2009). Other authors define social connectedness as a sense of keeping up-to-date, being involved, being in touch or sharing with others within ongoing social relationships, or a sense of having company, (IJsselsteijn, Van Baren, & Van Lanen, 2003; Markopoulos, Romero, Van Baren, IJsselsteijn, De Ruyter, & Farshchian, 2004; Romero Herrera, Markopoulos, Van Baren, De Ruyter, IJsselsteijn & Farshchian, 2007). Hagerty & Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, and Bouwsema (1993) describe social connectedness as occurring when a person is actively involved with another person, object, group, or environment, and that involvement promotes a sense of comfort, wellbeing, and anxiety-reduction.

These definitions highlight common features of other available formulations of the construct of social connectedness, (Newcomb 1990; Kearney 1998; Lee and Robbins 1998; Bellingham et al. 1989) as cited in Townsend and McWhirter (2005), which acknowledge its multidimensionality: connectedness includes a self-in-relation-to-others component, a more internally-focused self-component, and

connectedness to a larger meaning or purpose in life component. From a psychological perspective, connectedness can be defined as *relatedness*, which is viewed as a key feature of identity development. Timpone's (1998) definition, as cited in the same source, resonates with the context of this study, as it refers to social connectedness as the level of an individual's integration into his or her social milieu and the fullness of the resulting associative networks. The enduring feeling of belonging is what distinguishes connectedness from other forms of social contact.

### **1.1. Importance of social connectedness for human wellbeing**

According to Maslow (1968), the importance of feeling connected to others can be placed only behind safety needs and basic physiological needs. Belonging, as studies by Deci & Ryan, 2000; Patrick, Knee, Canevello & Lonsbary, 2007 show, is a powerful, fundamental, and pervasive human need based on strong biological and psychological mechanisms. Further confirmation concerning the essential contribution of social connectedness to human wellbeing is found in the growing body of literature on the link between social connectedness and health, as reported in a literature review on this topic developed by Ottmann, G. et al., (2006).

Kawachi and Berkman (2001), for example, report that lack of social connections is considered a major risk factor for poor health. Other theorists, as cited in Townsend and McWhirter (2005) like Moen (1998) and Rude and Burham (1995) complement this line of thinking by stating that lack of social connections can have a negative effect on people's health, adjustment, and wellbeing. Additional authors cited in this same source, like Buchholz and Catton (1999), assert that lack of social connections can be a source of psychological distress.

Stress is identified as a major precursor of pathological outcomes and social support, as made possible when people are sufficiently socially connected, is

viewed as the appropriate antidote to stress (Cohen and McKay 1984). Social support, as provided by one's social contacts, can, according to these authors, attenuate or prevent a stress response to a stressor or once the experience of stress sets in, it can reduce or eliminate the stress experience, thus, avoid a pathological outcome. A self-perceived adequate level of social connectedness is positively correlated with health and psychosocial well-being for the fact that it offers individuals increased social support options that are vital to effectively deal with stress (Berkman 1984; Brownell and Shumaker 1984, 1985; Cohen and Syme 1985; Cohen and Wills 1985; House 1981; Kahn 1980, 1981; Kelly et al. in press; Kohn and Schooler 1983; Whittacker and Garbarino 1983).

Cohen and McKay (1984) state that the term "social support" has been used widely to refer to the mechanisms by which interpersonal relationships presumably buffer one against a stressful environment. These authors refer to the moderating role of social support in the relationship between stressors and psychosocial outcomes as the *buffer hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, psychosocial stress will have deleterious effects on the health and wellbeing of those with little or no support, while these effects will be lessened or eliminated for those with stronger support systems. The same authors add that increased belonging and feelings of solidarity have a general elevating effect on mood. Many other studies highlight the buffering effects of available social connections against stress-inducing factors that are commonly linked to poor health.

In light of the focus of this study on undocumented migrants' social connectedness, it's worth noting that uncertainty, lack of information, and lack of control over one's situation, as many members of this social group must have experienced following the onset of the 2008 global economic crisis, have been found to be among the most characteristic sources of stress in multiple related studies.

Limited relational resources and resulting marginalisation and social unease, which many undocumented migrants were faced with while struggling with increased stress in their lives, represent major risk factors for poor health and developmental outcomes. This finding is reflected in the following studies:

- Miller and Rasco, (2004) citing Pernice and Brook's (1996) study of Southeastern Asian refugees in New Zealand, highlight the narrow association between social isolation and levels of self-reported depression and anxiety;
- Miller and Rasco (2004) also cite Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenberg's (1998) study of Iraqi refugees, showing that perceived level of affective social support is a stronger predictor of depression than level of exposure to war-related events.
- Ager and Strang cite Beiser (1993) who found that without social connections, migrants likely experience high levels of anxiety. They may suffer a risk of depression three to four times as high as others who have access to an adequate amount of social connections.

The following theorists are cited in Townsend and McWhirter's review of the literature on connectedness for their focus on the preventive and healing aspects of social connectedness. Hogg and Frank (1992) suggest that healing and recovery from emotional wounds arises out of connecting both within oneself and with others. Karcher (2002) has signalled the protective power of connectedness in preventing or otherwise helping to resolve intra and interpersonal concerns. Connectedness is seen as a health-promoting agent in people's lives. A further reference found on this topic worth mentioning is Riggs and Bright's (1997) contribution that psychological growth is intimately linked to connection with others, basing this assertion on the following components derived from social relationships that are crucially important for human development:

- An increased sense of wellbeing that comes from feeling connected to others
- Motivation and the ability to act positively both within and beyond the boundaries of the relationship.
- Increased self-knowledge and knowledge of the “other” in the relationship.
- An increased sense of self-worth.
- A desire for additional connections.

## **1.2. Importance of social connectedness for undocumented migrants**

The PADHI framework (2009) serves as a basic reference to understand the high relevance of social connectedness for undocumented migrants from developing countries. This framework recognises that social relationships, networks, and alliances are important aspects of people's lives. Relationships, according to this framework, are not only central to achieve a sense of belonging but also to access services or resources. Furthermore, this framework views social connections as powerful determinants of the degree of control people can exercise over personal and collective goods and services, and also of how much influence people can exert on their environment. Zarowsky et al. (2012) state that accessing a social network is a vital resource to manage and cope with risks and their consequences effectively.

Undocumented migrants from developing countries with scarce economic means certainly require informal social connections for essential social support. To begin with, as explained by Miller and Rasco (2004), integration into social networks appears to be essential for people belonging to non-western cultures that favour collectivist approaches to individual needs. Citing Englund, (1998) these authors also explain that people from non-western cultures view the self and individual well-being as inseparably embedded within a matrix of social roles and interpersonal

relations. Further support for this argument is lent by the fact that healing in these non-western cultures often involves restoring healthy relations among people.

Migrants from developing countries have further important reasons to engage in supportive social relationships in their destination countries. In the context of rupture from significant attachments left behind in home country upon migrating transnationally, migrants naturally need to strengthen their sense of belonging. They also need social contacts to orient them to the new cultural context and facilitate links with essential resources. Undocumented migrants, in particular, would face numerous difficulties to stabilise in their destination countries unless they had social contacts they could rely on for essential social support, since they face legal barriers towards integration because of their lack of legal resident permits. As Simich, Beiser, and Mawani (2003) state, to seek support from people from the same background or country of origin who have already gone through similar migration experiences only makes sense, since they have the same points of reference and likely have faced similar experiences and challenges with adjusting.

These same authors also say that intimate peers can provide useful support because they provide personal affirmation of common experiences of both origin and transition. Authors Kawachi and Berkman, (2001) state that peers can instil confidence that those who have only recently arrived will be able to cope in the new situation. However, according to Miller and Rasco (2004) many migrating people from developing countries that have arrived in developed countries report a lack of sufficient, naturally-occurring social support systems to deal with the demands of their new life settings, and that includes migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. As clear indication of this extreme, the same authors report that social isolation and consequent lack of social support consistently emerge among the most pressing concerns reported by refugees.

Mate Gabor (2010) emphasizes the importance of considering the *unsustainability* of a situation in order to understand health problems. A critical feature of unsustainable life situations is the lack or insufficient amount of available social supports. This was, precisely, the situation in which many undocumented migrants of African origin were caught in after their social networks disbanded consequent to the 2008 global economic crisis. It is, therefore, important for migrant supporters to gain further insight into the particular challenges members of these social groups might face to establish an appropriate degree of social connectedness in the unsustainable life situation they are caught in to prevent the detrimental health outcomes commonly associated with increased social isolation.

## **2. Theories to explore social connectedness**

There are numerous theories nested in different, though overlapping, disciplines that can assist in the exploration of reasons behind differences in social connectivity amongst members belonging to vulnerable social groups. This literature review has identified the following theories that might be usefully employed to explore the selected research topic:

- Social interaction theory (Sociology);
- Theories of Wellbeing (Psychosocial Science and Development);
- Migrant/Forced migrant integration frameworks (Integration)
- Medical (Trauma-Focused) Model (Psychology)
- Socio-Ecological Paradigm of Community Psychology (Ecology)

### **2.1. Social interaction theory**

Social interaction theory basically examines the ways in which people engage with one another. Different theorists approach the analysis of social interaction from different lenses. One interesting lens is the one provided by an emphasis on group

dynamics (Lewin, 1951). This particular approach posits that groups have a powerful impact on members at various important levels. Gustave Le Bon (1895) went so far as describing how individuals are transformed when they join a group. Various studies confirm this finding, e.g. maintains social order, (Shotola, 1992); forms the social nature and ideas of the individual, (Cooley, 1909); identity formation, (Durkheim, 1966). The group's influence on the individual extends to the way the person relates to other groups.

The underlying assumption of a focus on groups is that in order to understand society and individuals in that society, we must understand groups, since each individual is shaped by the groups he or she belongs to (Forsyth 2006). A group-level analysis draws attention to the fact that what the individual does reflects the state of the larger system he or she belongs to and events occurring in it (Steiner, 1974). Kurt Lewin's field theory of group dynamics, (1951) posits that the behaviour of people in groups is determined by the interaction of the person and the environment. Environmental factors include features of the group, the group members and the situation.

A group-level analysis in connection with undocumented migrants appears relevant in consideration of their high and prolonged dependency on groups in the transnational context, given their precarious life situation. The groups they belong to in their destination countries must exercise considerable influence on them, in absence of their families. When members of these groups lose this essential social reference, for various reasons, one could suppose that they would feel some degree of concern about what is happening to other group members. In a state of bewilderment, they might not easily adapt to a different group of people in a new life setting as it would not be easy to maintain familiar group dynamics. These abrupt and undesired changes might disrupt their usual capacity to socially connect.

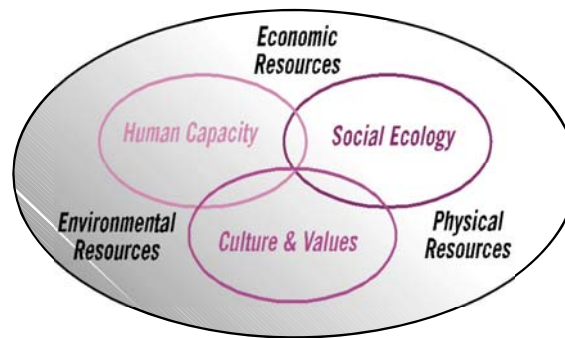


Other social interaction theorists examine social interaction through the lens of social status. Status, according to O'Neil (2006), refers to the relative social position a person holds within a group. It is assumed that we all have different types of statuses, independently of rank or power in society. Status differs from *role* in that human beings occupy a status (passive) but play a role (active). Every status has an expected set of behavioural expectations linked to it. In terms of the ways in which status is acquired, a distinction is made between *Achieved Status*, which is status one earns or chooses to take on, and *Ascribed Status*, which is one that is imposed upon the person involuntarily. Social interaction theorists focused on status analyse the ways in which people interact with each other on the basis of their acquired statuses and related roles.

This approach appears to offer an interesting angle to understand undocumented migrants' social connectedness in a crisis situation. Evidently, upon loosening ties with their established groups, they lost their achieved statuses within their group and could, therefore, no longer perform familiar roles that catalysed social connection. They were also unable to maintain their achieved status as essential providers for their families back in home country, given their state of joblessness. Furthermore, they acquired an ascribed status as destitute individuals in need of public assistance, which was likely quite humiliating to them. In this changed context, they had to establish a new status but without a consolidated group that could provide consistent anchorage, which could undermine their capacity to develop a new role that facilitated social connections.

## 2.2. Theories of wellbeing

The Psychosocial Working Group provides a conceptual framework that facilitates an initial grasp of the concept of wellbeing. The proposed framework defines three core and complementary domains of wellbeing: human capacity, social ecology, and culture and values, as indicated in the figure below:



**Figure 1. Psychosocial Wellbeing framework. (PWG)**

This framework draws on social capital theory (Putnam, 1993) by positing that each of these key domains of wellbeing contains the human, social, and cultural capital (resources) human beings require to respond to challenges in their life environment and, therefore, achieve personal wellbeing. The resources associated with human capacity are health, in its broadest sense, and knowledge and skills. Those linked with social ecology are the resources required to maintain effective social engagement. Finally, the resources associated with culture and values refer to structural elements that impact on individual wellbeing, like, for example, the cultural construction of experience and human rights. Thus, wellbeing is seen to be the outcome achieved by individuals who are continually able to leverage resources within each of these key domains in response to different challenges.

Complementary wellbeing frameworks identified in the literature describe similar values. All of them include consideration about the importance of social

connectedness to wellbeing. The Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group (WeD), (White, 2009), for example, sees wellbeing as integrating interlinked material, relational and subjective dimensions. According to the same author, *relational* refers to “connections between people and also the making of difference between them.” The New Economics Foundation (NEF) links wellbeing to the possibility of experiencing positive relationships. Michaelson et al. (2009) state that social wellbeing comprises two components: supportive relationships, and trust and belonging, both of which are critical elements of overall wellbeing. Robert Chambers (2004) argues that development depends partly on good relations with others, friendship, and love. Oxfam Hong Kong’s Planning Learning and Accountability (PLA 2008) framework stresses that a sense of responsibility towards others is an aspect of individual wellbeing.

### **2.3. Migrant/Forced migrant integration frameworks**

The important role that social connections play in migrants and refugees’ wellbeing has also been conceptualised through a number of available migrant/forced migrant integration frameworks. As highlighted in an Integration Literature Review developed by the Scottish Refugee Council, (2010) *integration* is a concept that has been defined in various ways and remains vague and chaotic (Robinson, 1998). Its current vagueness, according to Favell, (2001) as cited in the same source, might be owing to the multidimensionality of the concept after moving away from earlier interpretations that narrowly equated integration with assimilation. Furthermore, as this review reports, traditional countries of migrant reception developed their own set of assumptions as to what constitutes integration, ranging from blood ties, in the case of Germany, to assimilation in the French model, and on to ethnic pluralism in the UK, which persist to this day among those shaping

integration policies in these countries. In a separate reference, Beresneviciūtė (2003) reports that historically, social integration was primarily conceived in terms of economic, administrative, and legal integration.

The cited integration literature review developed by the Scottish Refugee Council contains a number of additional conceptualisations of integration formulated by different theorists studying migration movements that are worth noting. Threadgold and Court (2005) and Khuman, (1991) for example, conceptualise integration as primarily a process of becoming part of the host society while keeping a measure of original cultural identity. Khuman argues that integration involves spatial, economic, political, legal, psychological and cultural factors. Bosswick and Heckmann's (2006) integration framework, as examined in the same source, contains four distinct forms of integration:

- Cultural integration, implying acquisition of core competencies of the dominant culture and society;
- Interactive integration, implying acceptance of immigrants within primary relationships and social networks of the host society;
- Identificational integration, implying identification with core institutions and not simply participating in them.

The European Commission's Handbook on Integration (2007) provides an additional contribution to an understanding of integration, by defining it in terms of the outcome of a process involving the elimination of inequalities and acquisition of competences by those seeking to integrate; structural identification, implying acquisition of rights; and access to core institutions within the host society.

In light of the wide diversity of understandings and perceptions regarding the concept of integration, Ager and Strang (2004) conducted an enquiry, including

documentary and conceptual analysis, fieldwork in settings of refugee settlement and secondary analysis of cross-sectional survey data, in order to identify recurrent themes concerning integration that might serve to approximate a unifying definition of this concept. The results of this inquiry led to the formulation of an integration framework (see figure below) that could serve as a potential structure for analysis of relevant outcomes. Four identified themes, defined as key components of integration, form part of this framework:

- Achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education, and health;
- Assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights;
- Processes of social connection within and between groups within the community;
- Structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture and the local environment.

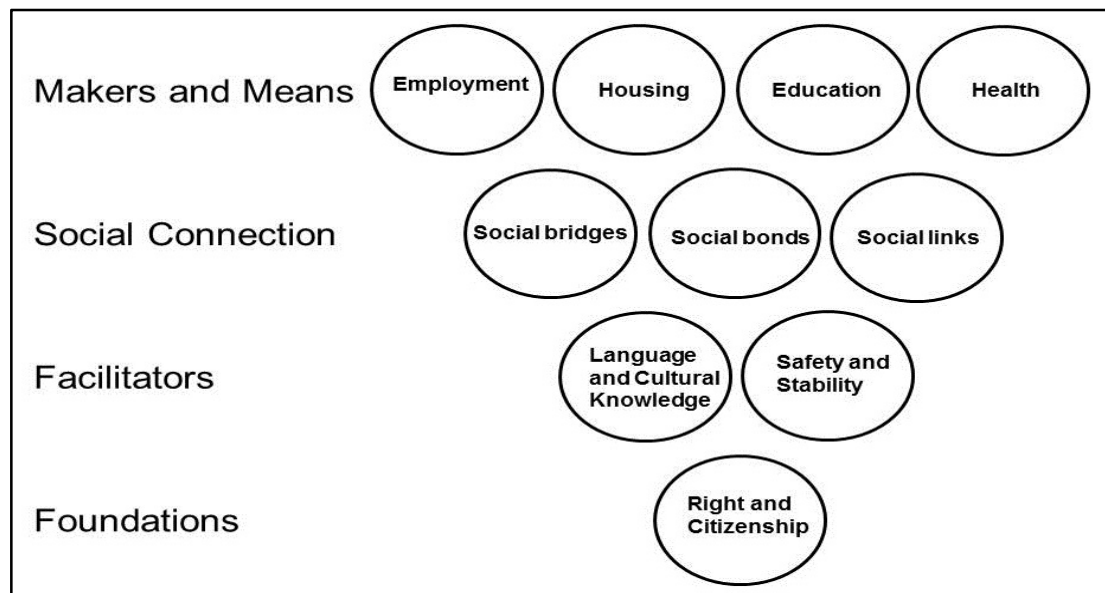


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domain of Integration (Ager and Strang 2008)

As these referenced frameworks highlight, social connection is considered a key component of migrant/refugee integration. The cited European Commission's Handbook states that "Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State residents is a fundamental mechanism for integration". Bosswick and Heckmann (2008), as cited in the referenced literature review developed by the Scottish Council, underscore the importance of "building personal relationships with members of the host society and forming a feeling of belonging to, and identification with, that society." Other authors highlighted in the same literature review define 'interaction' as a form of integration (Esser 2010) or 'interaction and community cohesion' (Threadgold and Court 2005).

In Ager and Strang's framework, social connection appears, indeed, as a fundamental driver of integration. A major finding during fieldwork was that understandings of integration within the researched communities were heavily influenced by expectations of relationships between groups within the area. Beyond an elementary expectation of 'tolerance' among different groups, those consulted defined an integrated community as one in which there was an active 'mixing' of people from different groups. The possibility of achieving a sense of belongingness figured as a defining feature of an integrated community.

In order to ease conceptualisation of the role of social connection in migrant/forced migrant integration, these same authors apply Putnam (1993) and Woolcock's (1998) concept of social capital, which distinguishes three types of relevant social connections: *social bonds*, involving connections with family and those individuals who share common cultural and religious backgrounds; *social bridges*, involving connections between different groups; and *social links*, involving relationships with state structures. Sim and Gow (2008), as cited by these authors, group these different forms of relationship under the heading of 'social connection.'

- Social bonds are considered important within migrant/forced migrant groups since they ensure a sense of continuity with familiar structures and enable settlement. Duke et al (1999), as cited by Ager and Strang, state that among other important supports, refugee community organisations provide a contact point for isolated individuals.
- The importance of social bridges for migrants and refugees is reflected in statements made by refugees and locals during Ager and Strang's fieldwork in the sense that people's friendliness was an important factor in making them feel 'at home.' It accounts for feelings of greater security and acceptance. Even though refugees might feel integrated in different respects, if they perceive unfriendliness and resentment from members of the autochthonous population, this would inevitably undermine their overall feeling of integration. Migrants and refugees may also feel less integrated unless they can participate in shared activities, which further underscore the importance of social bridges.
- Social links are also viewed as crucial for integration since social integration requires equal access to government services that migrants and refugees might need to stabilise their situation.

Ager and Strang's proposed integration framework appears particularly suitable to conceptualise the challenges that undocumented migrants might face while attempting to integrate into their arrival contexts. This framework highlights the various resources at different levels that migrants/forced migrants require to gradually achieve integration. At the outset, they need access to their basic rights, which provides the basic sense of safety that allows them to access facilitators of different types of social connection, like language skills and cultural knowledge. Through established social connections they are then able to achieve essential markers of integration, like jobs, adequate housing, health care, and

education/training. Evidently, undocumented migrants are severely constrained in this respect since, from the outset they are deprived of most of their rights because of their undocumented status. Under these circumstances, members of these social groups are unable to access facilitators of integration that would help them establish different types of social connection. Instead, they must integrate and continually depend on small social networks composed primarily by other same-ethnic and undocumented migrants, who may further limit their capacity to diversify their networks in the long run. In this context, it is unlikely that they will ever achieve the desired markers of integration, which exposes them to prolonged precariousness and its detrimental effects on health and wellbeing.

#### **2.4. Medical (Trauma-Focused) Model**

The arrival of high numbers of migrants/forced migrants from developing countries in developed Western countries over recent decades has also been addressed with reference to the Medical (Trauma-Focused) Model of mental health care that still dominates mainstream mental health services in developed countries. This model of health care derives its basic orientation from biological science (Capra 1988). As this author explains, the principal aim of biology is to identify single cause-effect relationships affecting biological processes. Inspired by this natural science framework and the Cartesian split between mind and body, the medical model fundamentally focuses attention on bodily disease, defined as an organic imbalance provoked by individually-specific biological factors that can be isolated and treated. With reference to this model of biological causation, critics of this approach, like Summerfield (2001), point out that advocates of the psychiatric perspective have traditionally attributed mental suffering to brain disease, organic imbalances, or genetics.



However, during the 1970's, following the Vietnam War, the mental health issues that migrants/forced migrants brought to the attention of health providers in the USA began to be conceptualised differently. The formulation of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis (PTSD)<sup>5</sup> that grew out of attention to the psychological suffering of Vietnam War veterans who had been regularly exposed to violent, war-related events was subsequently applied to resettled refugees from Latin America and Southeast Asia in the United States whose symptoms of psychological distress following exposure to violence resembled those of repatriated military (Miller and Rasmussen 2009). From this point onwards, the trauma-focused framework became a major reference to conceptualise migrant/forced migrant problems. By adopting this framework, advocates of the medical model were willing to acknowledge that there can be a common psychological response in human beings following exposure to dramatic external events, independently of individual factors.

As described by the PTSD diagnosis, psychological trauma occurs when individuals have been directly exposed to single or multiple dangerous life events of an unpredictable and uncontrollable nature that threaten an individual's physical and mental integrity, and following such exposure, they develop a constellation of characteristic symptoms of psychological distress that represent a normal response to unresolved fear, feeling of overwhelm and helplessness. It is, actually, when these symptoms manifest themselves after a period of latency of at least a month's duration that the PTSD diagnosis is warranted. Psychotrauma theorists explain that associated symptoms derive from the fact that individuals who have been exposed to traumatic life events block out of consciousness the most frightening aspects of what actually transpired during this extreme experience, in order to survive the

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<sup>5</sup> As described in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)

experience. These repressed images, therefore, remain engraved in the person's memory in their raw, fragmented state, causing exposed individuals to feel like they are continually reliving the traumatic experience, or as if their life was frozen in that historical moment. It is unresolved anxiety linked to these fragmented memories that gives rise to associated symptoms, according to this theory. This experience is reflected in the following accounts, reported by a refugee and an undocumented migrant:

*"When I arrived in America, though I had left the war physically far behind, in my mind, the soldiers were still chasing to kill me, my stomach was always hungry, and my fear and distrust kept me from opening up to new friendships. I thought the war was over when I left Cambodia, but I realize now that for survivors and all those involved, the war is never over just because the guns have fallen silent". Luong Ung, cited in Learning to Give quotes on refugees.*

*"Some years ago, it was difficult to look at the sea, it stirred me up too much. Even today I can't manage to write about it". Mamadou Dia (undocumented migrant in Garbus, A. 2014)*

As noted by Beck et al. (2008) and other authors, direct exposure to traumatic events can affect interpersonal functioning. This is because one of the characteristic behavioural responses consequent to psychological trauma, as defined in the PTSD diagnosis, is the affected person's persistent tendency to avoid frightening reminders of traumatic events that remain repressed in memory. In an effort to avoid stimuli that trigger recollections of painful life events, especially in life contexts where the risk of those events reoccurring remains high, the traumatised individual may feel strongly inclined to socially withdraw. These authors cite Janoff-Bulman (1992) who corroborates this view by stating that "trauma threatens the individual's

sense of self and the predictability of the world. Basic beliefs in trust, confidence, and connectedness with other people are undermined.”

This particular characteristic of psychological trauma appears worthy of consideration in relation to this research study. Undocumented migrants from Northern and Sub Saharan African countries attempting to reach Europe are continually exposed to events that can be appropriately considered as potentially traumatic. Their migratory journey is fraught with danger, violence, and uncertainty. During their transnational journey, which can last several years, they progressively become more vulnerable as they encounter numerous obstacles towards progress. Extrapolating from available accounts concerning migrant trajectories developed by authors Mountz, A. & Loyd, J. (2013), these obstacles often include:

- Increased poverty due to loss of belongings at the hands of bandits en route to their destinations;
- Poor living conditions in marginal areas of towns they must settle in for indefinite periods of time while gathering necessary funds to travel further, often through exploitative jobs;
- Strenuous desert crossing, during which many of their travel companions die;
- Constant fear of arrest and deportation due to tight police surveillance on undocumented migrants, which obliges them to lead a clandestine life;
- Detention and prolonged confinement in overcrowded and unsanitary centres at border areas where, as several humanitarian NGO's have noted, they are routinely beaten and tortured by border guards – this violence, according to Mountz & Loyd, citing studies conducted by Kearney (1991) and Rouse (1992) with Mexican nationals crossing the border between Mexico and the US, creates

vulnerability and fear that extends through their time as workers once they reach their intended destinations;

- Treacherous sea crossing during which many drown;
- Return to their country if and when they are arrested.

If they ever reach their intended destinations in Europe, life does not get much better for undocumented migrants, since EU states have erected a number of internal barriers to restrict their capacity to normalise their situation. A widely-acknowledged barrier they face is consistent refusal of their applications for legal resident permits, which are essential to access jobs in the formal economy and basic public services. Since their access to these resources is consistently barred, undocumented migrants are obliged to consider temporary jobs in the informal economy and go wherever these might be found across the country. These types of jobs are generally exploitative, unsafe, and underpaid. Undocumented migrants also face anti-immigrant sentiment within certain sectors of the local population, often propagated by political platforms and associated media outlets, which appeared to have become more acute during the 2008 economic crisis. These combined experiences can leave emotional scars that are difficult to heal while undocumented migrants remain in constant survival mode.

Observed differences in patterns of social connectivity among the crisis-affected undocumented migrants that are the subject of this research might, therefore, reflect the fact that certain individuals belonging to these groups have been directly exposed to the kinds of extreme life experiences that have been described previously. In a crisis situation like the one they were caught up in at the time of this study, reminiscent of previous experiences where they might have felt overwhelmed

and helpless, these repressed symptoms may have resurfaced in full force, thereby hindering their capacity to engage in social interaction.

## **2.5. Social-Ecological Paradigm of Community Psychology**

This literature review found that consideration in regards to the importance of social connection as a powerful mediating factor in integration and psychosocial wellbeing is a central feature associated with the ecological paradigm of community psychology, which is, therefore, presented in the following section in order to provide a broader theoretical basis for an understanding of undocumented migrants' social situation.

### **2.5.1. Basic tenets**

The social-ecological paradigm, as described by authors Miller & Rasco (2004), was developed by a group of psychologists in the United States in response to what they perceived to be the limited scope of the community mental health movement, which had emerged following passage of this country's Community Mental Health Centres Act in 1963. The act initially led to the creation of hundreds of community mental health centres in lower income communities across the United States that had traditionally not benefited from high quality mental health services. However, at the Swampscott conference in Swampscott, Massachusetts, USA in 1965, this group of psychologists criticised mental health centres' near exclusive focus on individual clinical treatment, at the expense of prevention, contrary to initial design (Bennet et al. 1966). From their perspective, treatment had to go beyond psychotherapy and psychotropic medication to address contextual factors that afflicted patients' lives.

In light of the perceived need to extend the existing model so as to encourage broader consideration of the range of contextual factors that are linked to human

suffering, from a preventive perspective, the conference participants drew on a variety of disciplines and theories for essential guidance. Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) became the bedrock of this new theoretical formulation due to its fundamental concern with the relationship between social systems and individual well-being in the community context (Perkins 2011). This theory considers the interrelationship between individuals and their life settings as pivotal to understand human problems. From this perspective, human beings are seen trying to continually adapt to their life settings; whether adaptation is achieved or not depends on the possibility of meeting the various demands posed by those particular life settings. This possibility derives, in turn, from the linkage between individual coping resources and matching adaptive resources situated at different levels within the environment.

Cohen and McKay (1984) cite Lazarus (1966) who reports that poor adaptation is more likely to be the outcome in life environments where individuals may find it difficult to generate the appropriate coping response while facing various demands. This experience causes stress, especially where, as these same authors state, citing Sells, (1970) there might be a sense that the consequences of failure to meet certain demands effectively are important. Prolonged stress due to persistent inability to resolve social and material challenges may have incapacitating effects, as it erodes people's available coping resources and taxes their mental health (Miller and Rasmussen 2009) From this theoretical perspective, it is, therefore, critically important to consider the ongoing problems in people's lives for their potentially negative effect on overall adaptation. Understanding the full implications of these problems requires a whole ecological systems analysis, as problems are commonly interwoven with political, institutional, cultural, social and environmental factors that structure people's lives and threaten their well-being (Perkins 2011).

### **2.5.2. Social networks in social-ecological theory**

The ecological paradigm refers to social networks as a vital adaptive resource, (Miller and Rasmussen 2009) as these supportive structures allow individuals to effectively cope with demanding situations (Cohen and McKay 1984). Many human problems appear connected to weak or non-existent social networks and resulting lack of psychological sense of community. While integrated in available social networks, people find the supportive environment they need to mobilise their inherent capacity to adapt and take control over their environment (Perkins 2011). According to Cohen and McKay, supportive social connections can offer guidance, emotional support, practical problem-solving possibilities and opportunities to share resources, which are crucial to maintain a sense of security, of continuity with the past, and re-establish normalcy.

Social connections, according to these same authors, might also suggest alternative ways of coping or convince persons that their coping abilities are adequate to respond to the particular situation, or even enable them to appreciate that if a critical need to cope arises, others will be there to help out. Pearlin and Schooler (1978), as cited by Cohen and McKay, (1984) state that social contacts can get people to focus on more positive aspects of a troubled situation. They also cite Pennebaker and Funkhouser, (1980) who add that social contacts may help to focus on more positive things about their lives, therefore, distracting the person's attention from the stressor.

### **2.5.3. Migration/forced migration and social networks**

There is currently widespread awareness, reflected in the literature on international migration, about the crucial role that social networks play in promoting and facilitating international migration. Aside from enabling individuals to migrate transnationally and facilitating settlement at their destination points, migrant social

networks play a critical role in reducing migrant vulnerability, more so, as is widely recognised, in relation to undocumented migrants who depend on them almost exclusively and over an extended period of time owing to their difficulties to access public supports. In light of this fact, the following section will first describe how migrant social networks are conceptualised in international migration theory from three different perspectives. The first presentation concerns Migrant Systems and Network Theory, followed by a presentation on Social Capital theory and finally, a presentation on Migrant Trust Networks Theory.

#### **2.5.3.1. *Background to international migration theory***

Initial theories regarding international migration explained this phenomenon in purely economic terms. International migrants were seen as rational actors who, upon evaluating a combination of push factors in their country of origin (namely, unemployment or low wages) against a set of pull factors in the country of possible destination, (namely, available employment and higher wages) decided, very consciously, to move (O'Reilly, 2012). This author references Lee (1966) who found that, although variations of this neoclassical economic and linear model of migration could include attention to personal factors influencing the decision to leave or, citing Piore (1979), might be motivated more by pull factors than by push factors, migratory patterns were traditionally viewed as triggered and maintained mainly by economic factors. The fact is, though, as Russell King (2012) points out, that migration is too diverse and multifaceted to be explained in a single theory.

#### **2.5.3.2. *Migrant systems and network theory***

Increased awareness of multiple intervening factors underlying international migration led to the development of more systemic theoretical approaches to the study of this phenomenon. Migration Systems and Networks theory acknowledges



the crucial role that family and social contacts, both at place of origin and at destination in the transnational context play in encouraging international migration. O'Reilly (2012) refers to Castles and Miller (2009) as major exponents of this theory who, while not discarding the contribution of alternative approaches to the study of international migration focused on structural (macro level) and agency (micro level) aspects, posit that in order to understand the full complexity of international migration, intermediate (meso level) variables must be taken into consideration as well.

The meso level, according to these same theorists, is composed of a number of different people: actors, groups, and organisations that play an important intermediary role in migrants' decisions and outcomes, like smugglers, gang-masters, lawyers and any other type of agents associated with what they term the 'migration industry', whose role is to mediate between migrants and political or economic institutions. Other authors (O'Reilly 2012; King 2012) include at this level the network of family and peers that migrants depend on to sustain their migratory project once initiated, which Castles and Miller situate at the micro level. O'Reilly cites Boyd and Nowak (2012) who distinguish three main types of migrant networks:

1. Family and personal networks
2. Labour networks
3. Illegal migrant networks.

Migrant Systems and Network theory, therefore, suggests that international migration movements are multi-causal in nature, and for this reason, both the wider context issues as well as the systems in place that migrants internalise must be considered in order to understand their decisions and outcomes (O'Reilly 2012). In short, it is necessary to examine men's and women's choices in the context of their

families, friends and other networks within which they are located (King 2012) rather than view individuals as simply reacting to contextual circumstances.

Beyond their role in promoting migration by encouraging and even funding the outward journey, these networks also help anchor in-coming migrants into their new communities, (King 2012) by directing them to available supports to find jobs, accommodation, financial assistance and various other types of support. Quite frequently too, well-established migrant groups have set up a number of community-based resources that same ethnic newcomers can rely on to address a range of practical matters, i.e. migrant associations, clubs, places of worship, shops, cafes, and even professionals such as doctors and lawyers (O'Reilly 2012). In this sense, they prove vital to enable migrants to form a community and sustain their migratory project. Not least important is the fact that these established networks enable members to retain ties with home country.

Migrant Systems and Network theory reflects similar views as those held by the ecological paradigm, since both frameworks acknowledge the importance of examining the ongoing interaction between macro, meso, and micro level elements that affect people's lives within the eco-systems in which they live, and with due consideration to a historical perspective (O'Reilly, 2012).

#### **2.5.3.3. *Social capital theory***

As previously noted, migrant social networks fulfil a basic enabling function. International migrants are able to progress in their arrival contexts thanks to a series of benefits they have access to within established social networks they belong to. Sociological literature currently refers to the combined benefits that people can draw from affiliation to different networks as *social capital*. Although applications of the concept are broad and there is, therefore, still no commonly agreed upon precise

definition of social capital (Claridge 2004), this author cites Portes (2000) who says that social capital is generally defined as the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures.

As discussed by Martti Siisiainen, (2000) one of the earliest contemporary theorists of social capital, Pierre Bourdieu (1985) viewed this concept in the context of class struggle. He primarily focused attention on members of the middle class and their struggle to advance their mainly economic interests by accumulating cultural and social capital. As such, he defined the concept as 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'. Another, broader perspective on social capital is proposed by Robert Putnam (1995), who breaks up the concept in three separate parts: moral obligations and norms; social values (especially trust) and social networks (especially voluntary associations) thereby, highlighting the collective value of social capital. He describes social capital as features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. From Dekker and Uslaner's (2001) perspective, social capital is about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity.

Due to the existing diversity of definitions regarding social capital, Tristan Claridge (2004) advocates for its operationalisation in particular contexts. The theory of Migrant Trust Networks (Flores-Yeffal 2013) elucidates the particular processes by which undocumented migrants access specific forms of social capital they require to thrive in the transnational context. The following section explores this theory in depth given this study's focus on undocumented migration in Spain.

#### **2.5.3.4. *Migrant trust networks theory***

Migrant Trust Networks theory acknowledges, like Migrant Systems and Network theory, that a primary reason for which people migrate internationally is because of the social networks available to them, both in country of origin and at destination, since social networks are essential to launch the migration project, settle in at intended destination and find employment as quickly as possible (Flores-Yeffal, 2013). Were this type of social capital not available at point of origin, candidates for migration would have to sell all their possessions to carry out a rather expensive transnational journey. Migration literature has made extensive reference to the fact that many international migrants and especially undocumented migrants, who tend to originate in their countries' poorer rural areas, need to borrow money from family, community members or anyone else that feels obligated to help fund their outward journey. It is otherwise logical that migrants would require a network of different social contacts to address their various needs, since the amount of support they need would be excessive for a single person to respond to.

Where Migrant Trust Networks theory enriches the understanding of migrant social networks is by highlighting the specific parameters that characterise undocumented migrant networks. This specific type of network depends critically on trust among its members in order to maintain itself, given the undocumented status of most network members. By all accounts, undocumented migrants find themselves in a delicate position because of their lack of legal resident permits. In Spain, they face the possibility of arrest, detention, and deportation at any moment. For this reason, they fear approaching different public institutions, like hospitals, educational centres, and job placement offices, out of concern that staff will report them to immigration authorities. In fact, they may experience fear going out at all, as reflected in the following statement made by Arnold Mangamba, an undocumented

migrant from Senegal that was interviewed for an article in the Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, who says: “the day I got my papers was the most wonderful day of my life. I was no longer afraid to go out on the street” (Junquera, N. 2012). There may be urban areas where they might be less welcomed and, therefore, it is best to stay away from. Some employers may take advantage of their lack of local language skills and desperate need for jobs to employ them and then refuse to pay them under threat of reporting them to the police. Even other migrants may betray them for their own advantage. Faced with these kinds of risks, they require trusted sources of quality information, solidarity, and protection. Their peer networks fulfil this basic function.

The level of trust sought by undocumented migrants’ due to their fragile social situation is, in fact, so high that access and continued involvement in undocumented migrant networks is entirely conditional on meeting certain shared expectations by all participating members. As Flores-Yeffal (2013) explains, it is often insufficient to be just another undocumented migrant who has undergone similar struggles to be admitted into an undocumented migrant network, although this factor certainly helps. It functions more like an exclusive circle. In the delicate legal situation which they are found, admission more often hinges on shared cultural background and religious faith among network members. Cultural and religious homogeneity reassures network members that they will all dutifully abide by cultural and religious values, like altruism and collective action that are considered essential to overcome different obstacles and minimise risk in the migration context. Not surprisingly, as noted by the same author, most network members have usually been in relationship to one another to some degree before migrating internationally.

Flores-Yeffal points out that another clear indication that trust is a central concern in undocumented migrants’ social networks is the characteristic operationalisation of

a social mechanism within these types of networks that Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) refer to as *enforceable trust*. According to this concept, network members continually apply social monitoring mechanisms in order to ensure that other members of the network are consistently compliant with the accepted, internal code of behaviour. If any member violates the group's trust, they are conveniently punished or ostracised by the group in order to restore trust. In her study of Mexican undocumented migrants in the United States, Flores-Yeffal found that most undocumented migrants who were part of a social network respected the group's social norms in order to protect their reputation, which is another sign of the high value placed on being trustworthy within undocumented migrant networks. As cited by Flores-Yeffal, other authors, like Tilly (2007) have reached similar conclusions. Tilly highlights the fact that migrant networks operate simultaneously as sites of social insurance and social control.

In summary, undocumented migrants rely essentially on relationships of trust within their established networks in order to overcome their acquired vulnerability. Not only the effective functioning but the very survival of the undocumented migrant network depends on a high degree of trust between its members. It is a precondition to access other benefits that association with the network might provide. Any disloyalty that is not properly addressed could cause the network to disintegrate, as it would fail to live up to members' expectations of trust and safety, according to its basic function. Given these conditions, network members foreseeably develop strong ties over time and may become deeply embedded in these networks.

#### **2.5.4. Critique of major approaches**

The various theoretical perspectives that have been presented and described in this literature review both complement and diverge from each other on critical points.

The socio-ecological paradigm of community psychology validates theories of wellbeing and integration by its consideration of the interplay between individual and external factors in personal outcomes. Individuals are seen engaging with or reacting to adversity in various ways depending on their available internal and external resources. A sufficient amount of appropriate resources that are accessible to the individual will permit positive coping, whereas an inadequate supply of such resources is likely to trigger negative coping patterns.

This theoretical perspective diverges from the medical model's near exclusive attention to the symptoms resulting from exposure to traumatic events as the main explanatory factor for individual outcomes and, consequently, the need for therapeutic interventions delivered by professionalised external agents to reduce them. Instead, and while acknowledging the deleterious effects of traumatic exposure on the individual, the socio-ecological perspective upholds the notion of the individual as an actor with capacities to generate adequate responses to adverse life circumstances, which originate in broader distress-producing contextual issues rather than only in single traumatic events. For this reason, from the socio-ecological perspective, it is not only important to facilitate use of available resources at all levels but it is also important to promote social change to achieve successful outcomes.

The diverging propositions held by the medical model and socio-ecological paradigm echo the wider, ongoing debate between proponents of each theoretical framework regarding the appropriateness of taking a wider or narrower approach to migrant/refugee mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. This debate is driven, at least partly, by differing views regarding variance in individual outcomes following exposure to traumatic events. From an ecological perspective, the observable variance is explained by the effect of intermediate variables that may result from

traumatic events or exacerbate their impact, (Miller and Rasmussen 2009). By intermediate variables, what is actually being referred to is a set of ongoing life stressors at different levels that exposed migrants and refugees are often unable to control, e.g. poor housing, unemployment, separation from loved ones, discrimination and racism, to name a few. These variables differ from person to person, even when they might have been exposed to similar traumatic events.

Summerfield (2001) provides further evidence in support of this contention by citing studies focused on those exposed to a range of manmade and natural events, which, reportedly, have consistently found that “factors before the event account for more of the variance in symptoms of the disorder than do characteristics of the event itself. These factors include having the tendency to respond to life experiences with negative emotions (trait neuroticism); believing that one is helpless in the face of events; using an emotion-focused coping style (“how am I feeling?”) rather than a problem-focused coping style (“what do I need to do?”); having a history of psychiatric disorder; and on whether social support is available, whether religious or political commitment is present, and the person's level of intelligence”.

From a trauma-focused standpoint, variance is explained by the dose-effect concept, i.e. the more extreme the event and the longer the exposure, the more incapacitating trauma-associated symptoms are likely to be. The fact that some individuals become severely traumatised following their extreme life exposures, therefore, warrants exclusive attention on stabilising trauma symptoms through individually-based therapeutic procedures. It is only in so doing that they will be able to gain some control over their adverse life environment. Ecological theorists, however, express concern that by not recognising the fact that symptoms of distress might also be linked to broader adverse circumstances, the wider contextual factors



that might be involved and which concerned individuals might actually prioritise remain unaddressed.

Beyond a particular set of symptoms migrants and refugees might suffer as a consequence of previous life exposures, ecologically-oriented theorists, like Miller and Rasco (2004), underscore the fact that a number of current adversities in their lives may cause them to feel continually insecure and uncertain about their future. Related anxieties must, therefore, be factored in when attempting to understand their social reactions. Widely recognised, common concerns expressed by migrants and refugees are stigmatisation, discrimination, racism, marginalisation, which one could safely assume might impinge on social connection. Critics of the medical model raise concerns that the attribution of symptoms of distress to underlying mental disorders risks individualising and pathologising what are, in fact common human responses to abnormal circumstances; these attributions may stigmatise migrants and refugees further. Since, from an ecological standpoint, there is need to understand the multiple levels at which a problem can be analysed, an exclusive focus on event-induced psychological trauma may miss important considerations of context in which the individual is living, and, therefore, fail to promote full recovery, causing traumatised individuals to feel continuously helpless.

Another important point of divergence between both theoretical frameworks, as authors Miller and Rasmussen, (2009) point out, revolves around recognition of the importance of acknowledging indigenous perceptions of health and wellbeing. According to indigenous perspectives, health is the state of general wellbeing that results from harmonious relationships held not only between the person and her or his world but also with the unseen world inhabited by ancestral spirits. The evident emphasis given to social linkage as an essential component of health in many of the cultures where migrants and refugees come from is an important argument in

support of the ecologically-oriented notion that what members of these populations require most importantly is to balance their social ecology.

On the basis of the indigenous point of view, it is possible to see that what people from cultures where the medical model is not dominant might consider most traumatising is the lack of social relationships. A trauma-focused approach that seeks to reduce symptoms of psychological distress without due attention to social distress, therefore, risks being incomprehensible and ineffective for members of these societies. For this reason, ecologically-oriented theorists advocate for community-based, psychosocial interventions that help restore the overall conditions that migrants and refugees require to achieve wellbeing on their terms.

The following table provides basic differences between both major theoretical frameworks identified:

**Table 1 Comparative table of both identified approaches**

<b>Comparisons</b>	<b>Ecological Paradigm</b>	<b>Medical Model</b>
<b>Worldview</b>	Interplay between individual and wider environmental factors is crucial in individual outcomes.	Individuals are affected to varying degrees by exposure to single or multiple traumatic life events.
<b>Implications for social connection</b>	Social connection depends on the availability and accessibility of individual and environmental resources.	Extreme life exposures may affect interpersonal functioning by causing avoidant behaviour.
<b>Implications for solutions</b>	Interventions need to target individual capacities and transform life settings to make them more enabling.	Trauma-related symptoms need to be reduced through specific technical procedures so that affected individuals can regain control over their situation.

Since undocumented migrants are known to face continuous adversities in their life settings, which keep them in an unstable situation over extended periods, it

seems reasonable to explore the multiplicity of key factors that might significantly influence their capacity to socially connect. The ecological perspective appears most suited to capture this complexity and, therefore, forms the theoretical basis for this study. In line with this theoretical approach, the following section identifies a number of risk/threats and protective factors (individual and community resources) that could be potentially relevant in the context of this research.

## **2.6. Risk and Protective factors**

Consideration to risk and protective factors in particular life contexts is emphasised in Prevention Science, (Coie et al. 1993). After defining what these constructs actually mean from the perspective of Prevention Science, a number of risks and protective factors that appear relevant in relation to the selected study group of undocumented migrants of African origin living in Barcelona, Spain are identified and discussed, with reference to the available literature on those specific topics.

Within Prevention Science, risk and protective factors are defined as precursors of dysfunction or health. Risk factors refer to a set of likely precipitants for poor adaptation outcomes, e.g. high poverty, limited social resources, weak social ties, to name a few obvious ones. Exposure to several risk factors has been noted to have cumulative effects and increase vulnerability. Risk factors may also have a greater impact during different developmental periods. Protective factors, on the other hand, refer to a variety of individual and social attributes that improve people's resistance to risk factors or mitigate their effects, e.g. individual characteristics, temperament, dispositions, skills, and social support. Coie et al cite Dignam & West, (1988) and Wheaton, (1986) to further clarify how protective factors operate by "interacting with the risk factor to buffer its effects, disrupt the mediational chain through which the

risk factor operates to cause the dysfunction, or prevent the initial occurrence of the dysfunction”.

As noted by these same authors, there is usually not a single risk or protective factor that can explain health outcomes. Rather, and from a systemic perspective, they acknowledge the fact that human behaviour unfolds in the context of multiple systems of influence whose effects may vary depending on stage of personal development. Quite interestingly, they also state that an individual's overall risk may result from the interaction of personal dispositions and environmental risk factors. These values lie at the core of the social-ecological perspective and wellbeing frameworks that view human adaptation as reflecting the ongoing interplay between individual and environmental factors. In line with the social-ecological framework, these authors recognise that individuals may vary in their responses to the same environment, and that different environments may also produce similar responses for different people. In order to understand the nature of these interactions, they recommend assessing personal history, social and cultural context (e.g. cultural norms, beliefs, and practices), and life stage of the person.

### **2.6.1. Risk factors**

#### **2.6.1.1. Acquired vulnerability pre-recession**

Undocumented migrants are commonly referred to in the literature, media and by humanitarian organisations working closely with migrant groups as a vulnerable group due to the precarious situations in which they live as a result of their undocumented status. This section, therefore, examines the concept of vulnerability as theorised by different authors, mainly in the public health literature, since the vulnerability of undocumented migrant research subjects may be a critical factor influencing their capacity to socially connect in a situation of increased life adversity.

As discussed by Zarowsky et al. (2013), vulnerability has been defined on both narrow and broader terms in the public health literature. These authors cite Schroeder and Gefenas (2009) who say that to be vulnerable means “to face a significant probability of incurring an identifiable harm while substantially lacking ability and/or means to protect oneself.” A narrower view, according to these authors, is offered by Galea et al. (2005) who define vulnerabilities as underlying deficits at individual or collective levels. Other definitions found in the public health literature describe vulnerability as “the susceptibility to harm” resulting from the interaction between risk and protective factors available to individuals or groups,” or still, “the progressive loss of wellbeing related to social and economic deprivation.” Unlike a more narrow view, these latter definitions highlight the centrality of context to understand vulnerability, including consideration of social and cultural systems as well as political and economic trends.

Zarowsky et al. take these definitions a step further and articulate a definition of vulnerability as both a *condition* and a *process* in order to underscore the fact that vulnerability has both static and dynamic qualities. As a condition, vulnerability, according to these authors, refers to a state of heightened fragility of a specific individual or group. The notion of process complements this definition by suggesting that vulnerability emerges consequent to dynamic interactions linking material and social deprivation, poverty, powerlessness, and ill health, causing uncertainty – a salient feature of vulnerability. From this theoretical perspective, these kinds of risks are interlinked with health impacts, consequent to which they each reinforce each other in an ongoing cycle whose effect might increase vulnerability unless this cycle is mediated by effective interventions. In summary, the process dimension that is added to this particular formulation of vulnerability captures the underlying dynamics

that may, potentially, lead to *vulnerabilisation*, which excludes the assumption that vulnerability results from simple exposure to specific risks.

Whether vulnerabilisation actually occurs depends largely on the following set of critical determinants:

1. Initial level of wellbeing, i.e. the initial or underlying condition of the affected individuals or groups;
2. The degree of exposure to risk, i.e. exposure to individual or collective risks which could affect wellbeing;
3. Capacity to manage risk effectively, i.e. capacity to cope with risks and their consequences, by access to assets, public protection, social networks, and other resources.

This conceptualisation of vulnerability, therefore, complements other existing definitions of the concept by acknowledging the relevance of the vulnerability-resilience nexus. Vulnerability, from this perspective, reflects an ongoing process of vulnerabilisation consequent to repeated risk exposure the extent of which varies depending on initial level of wellbeing and ability to benefit from available supports to manage risks effectively. The same authors propose the following framework, adapted from a conceptual framework developed by Haddad, S. (2006), to help clarify where individuals might be situated along this continuum:

The framework takes as initial reference a threshold of socially acceptable wellbeing as may be defined by existing measures of social condition, e.g. poverty line. It then defines the following three major social groups with respect to available protections:

- 1) The less vulnerable are people who are protected against a non-socially-acceptable loss of wellbeing.
- 2) 'Fragile' vulnerable are those who are exposed to a loss of wellbeing that is not socially-acceptable.
- 3) Lastly, initially precarious individuals present a level of wellbeing that is already below the acceptable threshold. Shocks or risks can accentuate this deficit, depleting the resources of individuals and, thereby, decreasing their capacity to manage subsequent shocks.

The third defined category describes the general situation in which the undocumented migrants that are the focus of this study were caught in. These are individuals who are already living below acceptable thresholds of wellbeing, by all reasonable standards. Their sole support in the transnational context, once removed from family and friends left behind in home country, is traditionally provided through their available, like-ethnic social networks, which are not strong enough to help them achieve an acceptable level of wellbeing in their arrival context. In this vulnerable condition, they may not have been able to resolve the psychological and social impacts of their previous traumatic life experiences, as discussed in a previous section of this thesis, which contribute to their acquired vulnerability. New risks or shocks may likely aggravate the process of vulnerabilisation they are caught in, especially if these developments erode their scarcely available supports, since that might deplete their coping resources and prevent them from successfully managing those new challenges in their lives.

Vulnerability, seen from this broader perspective, appears, therefore, to be a major risk factor worth considering in relation to the selected study group of undocumented migrants for its potential influence on their capacity to socially connect.

### **2.6.1.2. Participation in undocumented migrant social networks**

Grace Pretty et al. (2006) underscore the importance of ethnic social settings that link members with broader social structures and provide contexts for developing skills and renegotiating social identities. Communities can, according to these authors, promote resilience and address the problems and needs of members. However, as Flores-Yeffal (2013) points out, several authors have also noted the potential risk of undocumented migrants becoming increasingly segregated from the mainstream society because of their near exclusive and prolonged reliance on their available peer networks. This author cites Tilly (2007), for example, who states that the operation of migrants' trust networks creates and depends on boundaries that separate members from outsiders, thus, may hinder contact with outsiders. This outcome may create further difficulties towards integration. She also cites Nee and Sanders (2001) who argue that "the strong unity of social networks can isolate and prevent migrants from assimilating into the host society by depriving them of access to greater social, education, and economic opportunities at the destination". Granovetter, (1973) and Wasserman and Faust, (1994) are other authors cited by Flores-Yeffal who refer to these networks as "clique like". They go on to say that the problem with these types of networks is that they only provide access to a limited amount of information, and it is very difficult for new information to enter them. These limitations may keep them in a precarious situation over an extended period as they continually miss opportunities for promotion.

These arguments resonate with findings by De Miguel Luken, V. et al. (2005) who found that undocumented African migrants' social networks in Spain were quite limited in size given the small overall size of this ethnic community in Spain. Ethnic communities from Sub Saharan Africa are, indeed, among the smallest in Catalonia and of more recent date (early 1990's) when compared to the size of other ethnic



communities. The Senegalese community, (20,166) was the largest Sub Saharan ethnic community in Catalonia in 2010 when fieldwork for this research took place. Remaining Sub Saharan ethnic communities were much smaller, as indicated in the table below:

**Table 2: Size of migrant communities in Catalonia in 2010<sup>6</sup>**

Country	Population
Senegal	20,166
Mali	7,011
Ghana	5,111
Guinea	5,026
Tunisia	562
DR Congo	80
Liberia	69

When considering the geographic spread of these ethnic communities, established in different locations throughout Catalonia, what this table reflects is the likelihood that the social networks that Sub Saharan migrants in Barcelona belonged to were already quite small in size even before the onset of the 2008 global economic crisis. The economic recession, therefore, affected members of these ethnic communities in particular by causing further downsizing of their already small social networks and limiting options for alternative social support. Many African undocumented migrants simply had no one to lend them a hand in this critical situation. They had few resources to counter different barriers to social connection that became more acute as a result of the crisis. The fact that a number of

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<sup>6</sup> IDESCAT: Foreign population by countries 2010 Catalunya

Moroccan undocumented migrants also took part in this study shows the extent to which even the Moroccan ethnic community, the largest in Catalonia, (233.968) was affected by the economic recession.

Critics of the social capital concept have also highlighted the “dark side” of social networks. Basically, theorists like Portes (1998) as cited by Paul Haynes (2009), have highlighted the fact that membership in social networks may come at a cost of individual freedom, given the obligations and restrictions membership imposes, under threat of exclusion. This same author cites Putnam (2000: 23) who suggests that such problems can be the result of an imbalance of bonding and bridging social capital in the way that bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves.

Flores-Yeffal also points out a number of additional disadvantages that result from adopting a more ‘socially distant’ position. Undocumented migrants may be unable to learn the language of the host country, since they don’t need to speak it within their limited social circles, composed of other undocumented migrants that speak their native language. Without local language skills, they must content themselves with jobs on the lower end of the job market. Members belonging to undocumented migrant social networks may also be prevented from learning the new rules and laws of the host society. This lack of knowledge affects them in the long-run, since lack of awareness of their civil or labour rights may expose them to continuous exploitation and poor safety standards in their precarious jobs. This author also notes that while integrated in migrant trust networks, undocumented migrants might sooner feel inclined to ignore their rights, as if they every spoke up they might place their and their network’s safety in jeopardy; their employers might refuse to recruit more undocumented migrants of the same nationality.

It also seems worth considering how undocumented migrants' social experience within their available social networks might influence their intergroup attitudes, as this dimension could also, potentially, impinge on their capacity to socially connect once they lose this important reference in a situation of generalised social crisis. This dimension has been referenced earlier on in the discussion on group dynamics. The Applied Social Psychology lens can prove useful to capture this particular feature of group dynamics. ASP is a sub discipline of Social Psychology, which, as authors Schneider, Gruman & Coutts (2012) point out, citing definitions formulated by Myers, Spencer & Jordan, (2009) is the parent science that basically seeks to understand the following four major processes operating in the context of social interactions: How people think about each other; How people feel about each other; How people relate to each other; and how people influence each other. As these authors indicate, these processes are then related to areas of broader social psychological concern.

Intergroup attitudes can be considered a particularly relevant topic for social psychological research in societies that are becoming increasingly multi-ethnic, like modern Spanish society. An intergroup attitude, according to the cited authors, can be defined by a person's overall evaluation of members of a group to which the person does not belong. Intergroup attitudes can be studied from different angles. One possibility is to study how these attitudes are formed. Summarising these authors' contribution towards a social psychological understanding of intergroup attitude formation, the determinants may be related to multiple factors. One noteworthy factor, for its potential relevance to this study, is the fact signalled by social psychologists that people's attitudes towards other groups may be strongly influenced by *seeing themselves as members of a particular group*.

This group, they go on to say, is referred to as the *in-group* as opposed to the *out-group* to which everyone else belongs, otherwise referred to as the in-group/out-group bias. Schneider, Gruman & Coutts mention research undertaken by Lyons, Kenworthy, and Popan (2010), which provided evidence linking negative attitudes and behaviours towards Arab immigrants among Americans to their degree of identification with their national in-group (i.e. being American). What naturally occurs as a result of in-group/out-group bias is that in-group members relate far better to those they most identify with than to those they feel differentiated from, even when, as Schneider, Gruman & Coutts point out, differences between groups may only be slight. This finding implies that simply belonging to a group contributes to the development of negative attitudes towards other groups. The Migrant Trust Network certainly appears like a particular type of in-group.

From this perspective, one can easily infer that negative intergroup attitudes may become more pronounced in a context of increased communal tensions, where particular groups are easily scapegoated for the country's poor economic performance, lack of employment, and increased crime. Competition between groups over scarce resources has also been found to be an important factor underlying negative intergroup attitudes. These tensions may easily give rise to a narrow "we-feeling" amongst in-group members who feel threatened by out-group members. In-group members naturally develop a set of internal norms that group members are expected to internalise and abide by at all times as a form of protection against external threats.

This predictable set of in-group attitudes towards outsiders in a situation of increased tension deserves careful consideration in the context of this study. While evolving within closed social circles to protect themselves from external threats, undocumented migrants may develop intergroup attitudes that hinder their ability to

engage in wider social interaction when they lose contact with this essential reference. The situation in which undocumented migrants were caught in consequent to the 2008 global economic crisis could be described as one of heightened hostility towards non-EU migrants by segments of the autochthonous population and increased competition among members of different migrant groups, due to job scarcity. These factors are precisely among those that reinforce negative intergroup attitudes. Bellah et al. (1985) and Selznick (1992), as cited in Flores-Yeffal (2013), suggest the need to understand contextual configurations for their influence on attitudes towards cooperation.

Based on awareness of the likely course of intergroup dynamics in crisis situations, this aspect might represent a critical risk to consider in attempts to understand undocumented migrants' patterns of social connectedness after loosening ties with their established peer networks consequent to the 2008 global economic crisis.

#### **2.6.1.3. Risk of aggravated social exclusion**

It is clear from the discussion on Migrant Trust Networks that whatever happens to these social networks has serious implications for undocumented migrants. However, MTN's are bound to fragment due to their inherent fragility, as their maintenance depends crucially on the availability of jobs (Flores-Yeffal, 2013). Undocumented migrants naturally seek to integrate networks with the basic expectation that through this involvement, they will be able to access jobs that would otherwise be difficult to identify and access. If the network can't fulfil this basic function, as may occur during a period of job market decline, it will likely collapse. According to Mahler 1995 and Menjivar, 2000, as cited in Flores-Yeffal (2013), network fragmentation can also occur as a result of increased competition among network members over scarcely available jobs, since this has the effect of eroding

ethnic solidarity and cohesiveness among them. This, in turn, is likely to lead to social exclusion.

Definitions of social exclusion in the available literature are varied. In a 2003 European Commission report on causes and dynamics of social exclusion among immigrants in Europe, Gimenez and Malgesini (2000) define social exclusion as the social process in which a person or social group does not develop in an integrated manner within a given society, generally due to compulsory reasons which have so determined it. These authors point out that the lack of political, economic, social, and cultural participation is one of the visible signs of this exclusion. In contrast with marginalisation, which reflects a marked discrimination in the process of integration, exclusion refers to a structural process of separation, and it is, therefore, difficult to reverse unless programs of integration are undertaken to attack the roots of the problem. In this same report, Alain Touraine (1991) defines social exclusion as the accumulation of deprivations (resources, social relationships, means of participation), evictions (from work, from school, from the city), further aggravated by social and/or ethnic segregation. Another author quoted in this report, Vitiello, M. (2003), adds that social exclusion is a process that prevents individuals from improving their material, social, and cultural living conditions and may, in fact, worsen those conditions. These definitions underscore the multidimensional character of social exclusion.

The definition of social exclusion as a downward spiral resonates with Zarowsky's et al.'s (2013) description of the process of vulnerabilisation. It considers the multiple dynamics occurring at different levels that may gradually transform living conditions for the worse unless, as Vitiello (2003) points out, the individual can access and use networks of relationships that prevent these negative outcomes. These networks are able to prevent further deterioration by, fundamentally, offering

members access to collective efficacy. The notion of collective efficacy was initially formulated by Rob Sampson and Felton Earls (1997) who define this construct as the normative property of social networks that pursue a common purpose. Among other possible uses, collective efficacy tries to build social resources that promote reciprocal exchange between members of the community and encourage informal social controls. Flores-Yeffal (2013) considers that collective efficacy is a major form of social capital provided by MTN's. Loss of social network, therefore, represents a major risk factor for aggravated social exclusion among undocumented migrants, since they have not commonly developed links with alternative sources of collective efficacy.

#### **2.6.1.4. Loss of sense of community**

After their established social networks disbanded under pressure caused by the 2008 global economic crisis, undocumented migrants, whose links with the broader context in which they live are generally weak, inevitably lost their sense of community. Sense of community, as described by Sarason (1974) is the feeling that one is part of a readily available, supportive and dependable structure that is part of everyday life and not just when disasters strike. According to Grace Pretty et al. (2006) community offers support and identity derived from those nearby or with whom there are meaningful ongoing interactions. Loss of sense of community, therefore, heightens risk for an opposite sense of dislocation and alienation to set in, which can, in turn, affect an individual's capacity to recover a sense of community. In this condition, the person may flounder without meaningful direction.

#### **2.6.2. Protective factors**

The notion of protective factors derives from recognition over the fact that the impact of risk factors on individuals varies in intensity and duration depending on their access to available intra-individual and external resources that, either

separately or in combined form, modify risks in positive ways. Resilience theory, provides an adequate theoretical framework to approach a discussion on protective factors that mediate risk in contexts of adversity. This section will, therefore, define the construct of resilience as theorised by different authors and highlight specific protective factors that could be relevant in the context of this research.

For a simplified understanding of resilience, authors' Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) definition of resilience as a *process or phenomenon of positive adaptation despite adversity* can be taken as a starting point. Different disciplines, however, define resilience according to specific characteristics. From a psychosocial-oriented perspective, Dowdney (2007), as cited in Veale (2010), focuses particular attention on context and views resilience as positive coping thanks to available support in the environments in which people seek to social integrate. The availability of social contacts that are supportive and encouraging (Ungar, 2011) is considered an important protective factor, likely because the individual can in this way derive the perception that the adversity might be short-lived, thus, enabling her or him to maintain an optimistic, confident outlook. Veale also cites Masten and Obradovic (2008) who describe individual resilience as the processes of, capacity for, or patterns of positive adaptation during or following exposure to adverse experiences that have the potential to destroy the successful functioning or development of the person.

While acknowledging the merit of these different perspectives, Veale (2010) notes the fact that even when supports are available, some people seem to have more difficulties than others in terms of accessing them and making effective use of them, for a variety of different reasons. Based on these noted differences, Veale formulates the concept of resilience as an emerging property of the systems lying within and between individuals. Since intra-individual and environmental systems



are, basically, interdependent, the absence or weakness of protective factors contained in either system will constrain resilience in a context of adversity. This formulation implies that the person's ability to engage in social relations with a strong reciprocal character becomes another highly relevant protective factor in contexts of adversity. As Veale points out, the same interactive model between these two major systems is reflected in Ungar's (2008) definition of resilience as the capacity to navigate one's way to health-sustaining resources.

Ungar (2011) formulates a systemic theory of resilience, contrary to a conception of resilience as a static trait of the individual, as commonly referred to in resilience research. When considering which important characteristics are commonly associated with adaptive coping in a context of adversity, the systemic approach takes a broad view and considers multiple factors lying at different levels in continuous interaction with one another. Ungar articulates the following major factors that make resilience more or less likely to occur, depending on the degree of individual exposure to adversity: (2014, p.6)

- Experience of adversity, i.e. severity, chronicity, ecological level, attributions of causality, cultural and contextual relevance of experiences of adversity;
- Promotive and protective factors related to resilience, at individual and contextual levels:
  - Individual level: temperament, personality, and cognitions;
  - Contextual: available and accessible resources, their strategic use, positive reinforcement by significant others, and the adaptive capacity of the environment itself;
- Temporal and cultural factors.

Ungar provides a synthetic definition of resilience that encapsulates these ideas, arguing that resilience is predicted by both the capacity of individuals and the capacity of their social and physical ecologies to facilitate their coping in culturally meaningful ways, through a process of continuous negotiation. He argues that resilience, consequently, occurs to the extent that people who are faced with adversity are able to engage in processes that link their accumulated individual assets up with available and appropriate resources in their life environments. A critical, contextually-based resource to buffer the impact of stress and promote recovery, according to Ungar is social capital, which he defines as family relationships, feelings of trust, and cultural embeddedness. What this implies is that if the social environment does not offer any or an insufficient amount of opportunities for social engagement, it is highly likely that individuals will display poor engagement even when they might have accumulated the kinds of individual assets that catalyse social relationship.

These arguments resonate with this research, as many undocumented migrants living in Barcelona, Spain during the 2008 economic recession may have appeared socially apathetic as a result of their difficulties in accessing appropriate social capital to cope with their particular situation. Ungar also explains that both risk and protective factors pile up; the more the individual is exposed to an array of risk factors in absence of a sufficient amount of protective factors, the higher the likelihood of poor outcomes. Undocumented migrants of African origin were, indeed, exposed to multiple stressors in their lives during the period of this study, some of which were a consequence of the 2008 economic recession, and some which preceded this period but became more acute. Coupled with this adversity, they had few stable resources to turn to. Therefore, their patterns of social engagement could be influenced by the scarcity or difficulties to access appropriate resources in their

social environment, coupled with the heavy burden of stressors they had to contend with.

According to Ungar, the pattern of risk exposure, the quality of the resources available, their protective function, and individual and collective coping strategies are known to combine to produce a number of different resilience processes or subtypes. These are noted below as they may help clarify the different relational coping strategies displayed by undocumented migrants that are the focus of this study:

- Avoidant
- Unaffected
- Minimal impact
- Recovery sustaining
- Maladaptive or hidden
- Growth

In summary, the diversity of social engagement patterns displayed by different undocumented migrants exposed to a similar set of stressors, i.e. destitution, loss of social network, etc. could, in light of Ungar's perspectives on resilience, be linked to heterogeneous patterns of resilience among members of this population subgroup on the basis of the concrete opportunities each of them found in this context to engage in processes that allowed use of available individual assets to socially connect. The community in which they were located could only offer limited assistance in this critical situation, as municipal governments eliminated or seriously downsized programmes to facilitate migrant social integration due to funding shortages; in fact, local policy makers took advantage of this situation to erect further barriers to prevent undocumented migrants from pursuing their objectives. In

order to steer their way out of this situation, undocumented migrants had to become very strategic and use what little they had in the way of assistance to their greater advantage. Not all were equally experienced in this respect, having depended almost exclusively on their established social networks to deal with different challenges.

A similar integrative interpretation of resilience is provided by the capabilities approach formulated by Ware et al. (2007). This framework places its emphasis on human agency, i.e. what people can actually do and be in everyday life. These authors point out that what people can do and be is contingent on having competencies and opportunities. Since opportunities are provided by social environments, social circumstances must offer opportunities for individual competency to be developed and exercised. In short, both human agency and supportive social environments complement each other. Resilience and social integration, from this perspective, would, therefore, flourish as individuals are able to engage, on the basis of their personal strengths, in developmental processes as made possible by their regular interaction with environmental resources. Imbalances in any one of these critical domains may constrain development and, therefore, resilience.

As an example that illustrates these points, individuals may have developed professional skills that match job requirements, but lack access to income-generating opportunities on the basis of their legal resident status. Or, because of their undocumented status, they may distrust medical services and, therefore, never reach out to them even though they could, legally-speaking, access these kinds of services. The result in either case would likely be diminished resilience due to existing imbalances between intra-individual and collective systems. In most challenging life contexts, both systems typically come under considerable strain by

heavy demands, which usually prevent the establishment of effective links between individual and collective efforts. Since each individual's personal resources, needs, and social ecology differs, outcomes will vary. This fact warrants an individual focus.

### **Summary**

The various themes discussed in this literature review in relation to undocumented migrant social connectedness demonstrate the need to take the broadest view possible to understand this phenomenon. While the effects of repeated and protracted exposure to traumatic life events may be an important consideration in the lives of undocumented migrants from the African continent, more recent research undertaken from a social-ecological perspective suggests that traumatic events are only one among many other pressing risk factors that may affect individuals who are continually exposed to a highly adverse life environment. It is clear from research that encompasses consideration of contextual influences that the nature of the multiple difficulties undocumented migrants continually face in the transnational context can equally affect their capacity for resilience independently from previous traumatic exposures, as these stressful conditions may erode systems they depend on for crucial support.

All factors combined have a compounding effect on resilience and, therefore, the entire range of factors situated at different levels must be appropriately considered. Although each approach may have its merits, it seems that the application of a resilience lens to the study of social connectedness aligns itself best with the interest of taking the widest view possible, since it draws attention to the multiple individual and contextual factors influencing social connectedness, both positively and negatively.

Quite interestingly, proponents for both the mental health perspective and the ecological perspective recognise that despite similar life exposures and other common characteristics, individuals react differently and, therefore, experience different outcomes. However, the explanation they each formulate for this variance has become the subject of debate. Whereas from a mental health perspective, variance is explained in terms of the 'dose-effect', i.e. those more exposed to trauma suffer more, the social-ecological framework emphasises the relevance of individual resilience to explain outcome variance; each individual has a variety of personal strengths to cope with adversity as these internal resources enable linkage with external resources that provide essential social support. Proponents of the social-ecological approach note that numerous studies show that variance can't be entirely attributed to degree of exposure (Miller and Rasmussen 2009).

On the basis of this literature review, it seems important to clarify the plausible reasons behind variations in social connectedness amongst undocumented migrants living in Barcelona during the economic recession period, as this understanding can be useful to psychosocial practitioners focused on migrant support in terms of highlighting the specific intra-individual resources that migrants might mobilise to establish essential social links in contexts of adversity. The main question this research seeks to answer is, therefore:

*How can variations in social connectedness observed amongst undocumented migrants in Barcelona be explained?*

With reference to the social-ecological perspective that orients this study, an initial line of enquiry to answer this research question needs to be directed towards understanding the range of major intra-individual and external factors that might, potentially, hinder undocumented migrants' social connectedness in an adverse

social environment. An essential sub question this research will aim to clarify at the outset is, therefore:

*Which factors hinder undocumented migrants' capacity to form and maintain social connections in this particular social environment?*

The answers to this initial sub question will highlight the multilevel constraints encountered by undocumented migrants of African origin during the economic recession period that could disrupt their capacity to form an adequate amount of supportive social connections. Against this backdrop, it will then become possible to reflect upon the range of protective factors that a certain number of undocumented migrants participating in this study are activating with the positive result of minimizing the effect of identified constraints, thus, allowing them to maintain social connection. The second sub question this research will seek to answer is, therefore:

*Which factors facilitate undocumented migrants' social connections?*

This information will be useful in terms of providing a more acute sense of the kinds of resources that those undocumented migrants who display poor social engagement patterns lack to ensure social linkage in contexts of adversity. Based on this available information, psychosocial practitioners focused on migrant support will be able to accurately assess the reasons behind poor social engagement and develop support interventions that facilitate undocumented migrants' regular access to supportive resources in their life settings. They will also be able to encourage the creation or further adaptation of external resources in their social environments that undocumented migrants require to form social links.

## 2.7. Conclusion

This discussion has clarified the major theoretical frameworks that dominate discourses on migrant/refugee health and wellbeing that could be applied to the study of social connectedness patterns within groups of undocumented migrants. Particular attention to a systemic point of view highlights the appropriateness of considering both risk and protective factors at different levels to understand these diverse patterns of social interaction. A number of major risk and protective factors were identified and discussed, in light of the academic literature. This review has highlighted the fact that the problem of outcome variance is explained in different ways by proponents of different overarching theoretical frameworks.

Undocumented migrants face numerous challenges in their current life setting. It is, therefore, appropriate to adopt the widest theoretical view possible to approach this topic. For this reason, the Social-Ecological paradigm, with its emphasis on differences in levels of individual resilience based on a range of intra-individual and contextual factors forms the main theoretical framework for this study. This framework underpins the main research question and sub questions that will guide this study.

The following chapter on the methodology for this research will discuss the ontological and epistemological basis for this theoretical approach and outline the data collection and data analysis methods used to reach the study's findings.



## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

In order to determine the most appropriate methodology to explore the formulated research questions it was first necessary to identify a group of undocumented migrants of African origin living in the community that could be appropriately engaged for this purpose. This chapter starts by describing how this identification procedure was implemented. It goes on to describe particular features about the identified group that could influence access and regular involvement with potential study participants, as were important to orient the study's methodological design. On the basis of this preliminary information, this chapter then goes on to explore the chosen theoretical framework that guides this study (the socio-ecological framework) from the perspective of its ontological and epistemological underpinnings, as this permits identification of associated research methods that might be suitably adapted to collect, record, and analyse relevant data required to answer this study's research questions. After describing these research methods and noting some of their possible limitations in the context of this study, this chapter concludes by specifying and justifying the selection of research methods that showed most promise in terms of the possibility to adequately answer the specific questions this thesis addresses.

### **3.1. Locating the research participants**

#### **3.1.1. Contextual background**

At this study's inception at the beginning of the year 2010, Spain was still experiencing the acute effects of the 2008 global economic crisis. Business closures in different sectors of the local economy and resulting job attrition, affecting

thousands of local workers, was almost a daily occurrence. The demand for unemployment subsidies and volume of home foreclosures spiked to record highs.

Public emergency accommodations for homeless registered increased demand from people who had previously been able to keep up with home mortgage payments. Tensions mounted, causing civil protest movements to flourish. The situation remained, indeed, quite tense. These unexpected developments represented a major setback for those, like undocumented migrants, who already occupied marginal spaces in society and depended on menial jobs in the underground economy for economic survival that were now being increasingly filled by local workers.

In this context, the Spanish government conceived a programme of voluntary migrant return to home country for those international migrants who were legally-established. Although many international migrants declined this offer, as acceptance implied they would not be able to return to Spain before 5 years, many opted to return to their country of origin without official recognition, as they could live more inexpensively on their unemployment cheques and return when the economic situation improved. A significant number also sought employment opportunities in alternative European countries that were less affected by the economic crisis, as their legal resident documents permitted.

These abrupt changes inevitably affected many African undocumented migrants, as those that left were the legally-established migrants they depended on for their accommodation arrangements. Although a certain percentage of legally-established international migrants didn't change their location, many had to relinquish their property due to inability to keep up with mortgage or rental payments, causing undocumented migrants they were hosting to have to move out

at the same time. Even when migrants with legal resident permits were able to maintain their property or tenancy agreements, undocumented migrants they were hosting who became unemployed and had no further savings had to move out anyway, as they were unable to contribute to household expenses according to established flat-sharing conditions. Undocumented migrants didn't have the same freedom of being able to return home or travel to a different European country.

To make matters worse, undocumented migrants faced the increased likelihood of being arrested and deported due to heightened government efforts to reduce the scale of undocumented migration in Spain. These concerns led members of these social groups to adopt a still more discreet profile than they already kept before the onset of the economic crisis. If it is already difficult to engage with undocumented migrants regardless of the situation, it certainly became more so in this particular situation. However, many undocumented migrants of African origin who lost their accommodation arrangements eventually found their way to local emergency accommodations where they could, at least, be assured of room and board for a short period while searching for alternative solutions. This shift in their circumstances led to concentrations of undocumented migrants in specific locations, especially those that were managed by local migrant support associations, where it became simpler to reach them.

### **3.1.2. Identification of research site**

In order to implement this research, it, therefore, made sense to identify and try to access an emergency accommodation where undocumented migrants might be congregated at this time. The possibility of accessing this type of venue became available through a social contact that works as administrator in one of the local migrant support associations whose main activity consists in offering shelter to undocumented migrants in transit. Traditionally, this migrant-support association

offered temporary shelter (up to two weeks) to newly-arrived undocumented migrants of African origin. However, due to the crisis period, it received municipal authorisation to extend the period of admission to the shelter to a maximum of three months. Many applicants had already arrived several years earlier, (as early as 2006 in some cases, when the construction boom in Spain required foreign cheap labour), which confirms the fact that they had lost contact with previously-established social networks.

At the time of this study, fifteen undocumented migrants within the 18 to 27 age range, representing 8 different North and Sub Saharan African countries, composed the flat's occupancy. Since they were living in property belonging to a migrant support association, it was first necessary to negotiate access to this site with association representatives. These initial exchanges usually serve to understand how project staff might find a research project beneficial and to tap into their knowledge on how it might best be implemented.

### **3.1.3. Stakeholder interests**

While exploring association leaders' perceptions regarding the psychosocial impacts of the ongoing economic recession on the undocumented migrants they were sheltering, they expressed special concern over the fact that certain residents appeared to isolate and become increasingly dependent on programme staff, by contrast with others who remained socially engaged and maintained a certain measure of autonomy. From their particular perspective, those residents who tended to remain detached during these difficult times were depriving themselves of available opportunities to rebuild their social networks and, therefore, would foreseeably find it increasingly difficult to break the cycle of dependency on the public welfare system for essential support over the longer term. In this condition,

they would most likely have to continually relocate to different area shelters, exposing themselves to increased risk of poor health outcomes.

Based on these observations, association leaders considered that it would be highly useful to use this research opportunity to learn about the major reasons behind differences in social connectedness patterns among the current resident group. This understanding would then serve to target future support towards helping members of these populations maintain an adequate level of social connection, as essential to foster their increased autonomy over the longer term. Perhaps, the shelter residents had different perceptions regarding the necessity of forming social connections at this time, which would be useful to contrast with administrators' perceptions in order to reach a neutral set of conclusions.

The consulted leaders also considered that the presence of a researcher with a professional background in the delivery of psychosocial support to forced migrant groups provided an opportunity to offer residents much needed psychosocial support on a voluntary basis while conducting research-related activities. Due to operational budget limitations, the association was not able to offer residents but very limited reintegration support through voluntary partners. In this way, the association would be able to offer a wider range of essential supports to residents, while gaining further understanding about their particular social issues. This proposal implied adopting a dual role as facilitator and researcher.

From these stakeholders' perspective, this dual role was required in this particular research site, since otherwise, residents were bound to resist participation in a purely research-oriented relationship, for obvious reasons: since all residents were involved in legal status determination procedures, a sole research focus would likely activate characteristic group norms of public display, based on suspicions that

the researcher might be, in fact, an infiltrated collaborator from the immigration authority. It was important to minimise a sense that they were being re-interrogated, as they had often been in the past. All a social researcher could expect from implementing a pre-established research protocol without further involvement with research participants would, in their opinion, result in superficial findings, at best. These recommendations deserved serious consideration, coming from informed stakeholders with extensive experience working with undocumented migrants in Barcelona over the past years. From a participatory perspective, it was also important to integrate their priorities to some degree, in order to elicit their trust and cooperation throughout the fieldwork.

After careful consideration, it seemed like the proposal to implement a dual facilitator-researcher role made sense. On one hand, it would be possible to provide residents with meaningful social support during this difficult period in their lives. It certainly didn't seem ethically sound to research people in severe need of social assistance without using one's more advantaged social position to respond to their needs in some way; as David Turton (1996:96) states, "research into other's suffering can only be justified if alleviating that suffering is an explicit objective". On the other hand, it would also offer the opportunity to observe their natural social interaction patterns over the period of their residence at the emergency accommodation and gather their personal perspectives on questions regarding their social life. Robert Powers' (1989) experience doing research of illicit drug abuse in London provided a helpful reference in this regard. He found that by offering to work as a volunteer in target research sites, he was able to play a meaningful role in study participants' lives and this provided the basis for the development of respect and trust between researcher, treatment programme staff and study participants, as necessary to pursue research aims.

#### **3.1.4. Sampling strategy**

As agreed with association leaders, participation in this study would be open to the entire group of residents rather than to selected participants, in order to avoid making distinctions between residents that could be misinterpreted by those not included in the study; they could feel marginalised by the researcher and suspect that selected participants were collaborating with external authorities in exchange for benefits they were being deprived of. Participation would also be encouraged rather than imposed in order to avoid creating the feeling among potential study participants that they were obliged to participate. It was expected that a certain number of residents might decline participation out of such concerns like lack of privacy in an overcrowded shelter or difficulties to disclose personal stories to an outsider based on suspicions regarding researcher authenticity. Although this sampling strategy did not ensure that all 15 residents staying at the emergency accommodation at a given point in time would take part in the proposed study, resident turnover ensured that the study findings were based on at least that many participants.

A total of 21 residents from different African nationalities passed through the emergency accommodation during the period of this study. However, only 18 residents voluntarily engaged to some degree in activities related to this research. The data collected is, therefore, based on regular observations and interactions with this number of study participants. 15 out of 21 residents fell in the 18 to 25 age range (71.4%), which confirms the noted increase in migrant youth arrivals in Europe throughout the past decade. These are, in their large majority, single men from their country's rural areas who have, in most cases, not completed their secondary education but who may, nonetheless, have received some vocational training to perform certain jobs. The primary goal of their migration project is to

improve their and their families' economic prospects. At least 5 participants had been sheltered in juvenile facilities in Barcelona until they had to transfer to a public facility upon turning 18 years old.

Table: Socio-demographic characteristics of the selected sample:

Name	Sex	Age	Nationality/Native Language	Marital Status	Employment	Education
Lam	Male	20	Senegalese/French	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Abd	Male	23	Ghanaian/English	Married	Unemployed	Vocational Trg.
Jam	Male	28	Ghanaian/English	Married	Unemployed	Secondary level
Mod	Male	19	Senegalese/French	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Hal	Male	18	Ghanaian/English	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Sal	Male	18	Senegalese/French	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Abde	Male	36	Moroccan/French	Married	Unemployed	Basic level
Sou	Male	24	Moroccan/French	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Ada	Male	22	Ghanaian/English	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Daw	Male	27	Malian/French	Married	Unemployed	Vocational Trg.
Kas	Male	19	Ghanaian/English	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Usa	Male	25	Moroccan/French	Single	Unemployed	Vocational Trg.
Ces	Male	18	Senegalese/French	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Sam	Male	21	Senegalese/French	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Ama	Male	18	Liberian/English	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Sai	Male	34	Moroccan/French	Married	Unemployed	Vocational Trg.
Mah	Male	22	Ghanaian/English	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Ema	Male	19	Ghanaian/English	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Rog	Male	44	Congolese/French	Married	Unemployed	University Degr.
Alp	Male	22	Guinean/French	Single	Unemployed	Basic level
Sab	Male	27	Tunisian/French	Single	Unemployed	Secondary level





Map 1: North and West Africa (<https://maps.google.co.uk/>) showing countries where study participants came from.

### 3.2. Theoretical considerations

In order to adequately explore the questions this research set out to answer it was important to adopt a highly flexible and pragmatic research design and methodology. A primary consideration was that the selected approach should offer ample opportunity to explore these questions through a combination of observations and regular interactions with the participants in their natural life setting, in order to reduce their self-guardedness as much as possible. This approach seemed crucial in order to establish the conditions of trust between researcher and study participants necessary to elicit substantial disclosures. Mindful of the fact that little could be known beforehand about the study participants, it was also necessary to adopt a methodology that allowed adjustments to the research questions if that was deemed necessary after engaging with them. This softer style of enquiry, according

to Creswell, (2009) presents the additional advantage of placing the researcher in a position where it is possible to consider multiple viewpoints, which often gives rise to new questions that might take the research in unexpected directions.

### **3.2.1. Exploration of suitable research methods**

After establishing these initial orientations, the next step consisted in exploring the basic theoretical assumptions of Community Psychology in search of compatible research methods that could be used in the selected research site, once appropriately adapted. This section, therefore, starts by focusing attention on the ontological and epistemological tenets of Community Psychology.

#### **3.2.1.1. Ontological and epistemological assumptions**

As described by Hanlin et al. (2008), Community Psychology derives its basic theoretical orientation from a number of core beliefs. These authors quote Griffin (1995) who explains that a core belief in Community Psychology is that our worlds are unevenly stratified in terms of wealth, class, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. They cite other authors, like Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, (2001) who say that this uneven stratification negatively impacts on people's wellbeing. To improve people's wellbeing, therefore, requires action on the world to change the prevailing system of inequality (Prilleltensky, 2001). Hanlin et al., add that change is possible by preventing and intervening in damaging social systems and creating alternatives to the current system in which we live. These same authors add that alternative systems can gradually take shape by promoting Community Psychology's core values of empowerment and self-determination, collaboration and democratic participation, health, wellness, and the prevention of psychosocial stress, and social justice.

With reference to the ecological perspective that underlies the Community Psychology approach, changing social systems that are characterised by inequality necessarily involves first considering and then addressing multiple spheres of influence, (Bronfenbrenner 1979) including political, cultural, environmental, institutional, and organisational spheres that impact on people's wellbeing. Particular attention is given within this framework to the ways these multiple influences interact in specific contexts to provoke an uneven distribution of power, since, as Hanlin et al. indicate, citing Levine et al. (2005), it is uneven power relationships that are seen to have negative consequences for the health and wellbeing of all individuals. These same authors cite Suarez-Balcazar, (1992) that advocate for a historical perspective on enduring power imbalances. Once these social dynamics have been duly recognised, the imperative is to act on them to bring about desired change.

According to Hanlin et al, (2008), empirical research is essential to promote these goals. The importance accorded to research within this framework is reflected in one of its core tenets, termed "praxis", which refers to the desired fusion between action, empirical research, and the development of explanations or theories. Lewin (1946), as cited by these authors, recommends that researchers who adopt this approach engage in a cyclical process of action and reflection: action for system or social change with reflection on the process of change. The ultimate aim of research conducted within Community Psychology's framework is to understand how values operate in community settings in order to then use this knowledge to generate action that promotes Community Psychology's stated values.

Advocates of this approach also emphasise the importance of conducting research in ways that are respectful of these values, in order to avoid possible incongruences. For example, an expectation is that the researcher will engage in collaborative relationships with research subjects. The fact of engaging study

participants in related discussions allows them to articulate their available resources and enduring constraints, as essential to gain a greater sense of control over their destinies (Rappaport, 1987). Collaboration also ensures joint participation in the construction of meaning about the phenomenon under study, as essential to reach conclusions that are considered valid by study participants. Since relevant results can only be achieved through narrow collaboration between researcher and those researched, it is advisable, from this standpoint, to approach the enquiry as an open process and accept initial ambiguity. Then, as discussed by Hanlin et al., citing Kelly (1996) be ready to improvise and revise concepts as the collaborative relationship evolves.

Finally, research conducted within the community psychology framework also emphasises the importance of considering the researcher's influence in the interpretation of what is observed. Citing Brodsky et al. (2004) and Kelly (1996), Hanlin et al. state that by virtue of the researcher's implicit embeddedness in the same context as the observed, the researcher will also be affected by the multiple features of the context in which the enquiry is unfolding. Therefore, in that any knowledge derived from the enquiry will, inevitably, be influenced by the researcher's biases, background, and beliefs, it is important to make them explicit and note how these elements affect the study. This is an important consideration in the context of this study, for the fact that little research has been done so far in relation to undocumented migrants of African origin, especially in the Spanish context, and, therefore, the researcher would necessarily have to rely significantly on professional background and personal intuitions to reach certain conclusions.

#### **3.2.1.2. Research methods in Community Psychology research**

Community Psychology's focus on multiple levels of analysis, in line with the socio-ecological perspective that underpins this discipline, requires application of a

series of research methods that are particularly suitable to grasp relevant details of context and history. In order to achieve this understanding, it is important that the selected research methods allow researchers to engage in regular interaction with those being researched in their natural life setting, as this is considered the most convenient vantage point from which to gain awareness of the wider range of relevant factors. These research methods must also show potential to promote Community Psychology's values. Since, as Stewart (2000) states, as cited in Hanlin et al., (2008) research conducted according to a Community Psychology framework is crafted to suit the phenomenon, and not the inverse, a final consideration is that the chosen research methods must be flexible enough to allow the research to change according to contextual feedback.

Community Psychology takes a pragmatic approach to research. What this means in practice is that no single accepted philosophy of science is taken as a consistent basis for research conducted within this framework; rather, it is possible to apply different research paradigms (qualitative or quantitative or a mixed method approach) according to their perceived usefulness to approach the selected topic. The choice of application and method, as Hanlin et al. specify, citing Banyard & Miller (1998), depends upon the formulated research question, i.e. what the researcher wants to know. Accordingly, there is no prescribed recipe to conduct data collection or data analysis that is advocated from the Community Psychology perspective. There is a wide variety of techniques to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data and researchers can flexibly choose which have the best fit with the research questions.

### **3.2.1.3. Justification of chosen research methods**

Despite Community Psychology's pragmatic and flexible approach to research, the described ontological and epistemological viewpoint results in a close association with qualitative research methods. This is because, from this theoretical perspective, it is important to gain an insider's understanding of the issues under study, as qualitative methods of data collection are particularly suited for, in order to then promote effective action on them. In fact, from this theoretical perspective, qualitative methodology may be the only suitable approach to examine many complex social phenomena and circumstances (Hanlin et al. 2008).

Qualitative data collection methods are considered particularly applicable in research undertaken from a socio-ecological perspective as they allow researchers to take position amongst those being researched in their natural life setting to learn about multiple factors influencing their wellbeing, from their own perspective, (Creswell, 2009) which is in line with the value of empowerment. By use of qualitative data collection methods, researchers can establish ongoing relationships with study participants based on trust as necessary to elicit detailed information on what they might consider rather intimate topics (Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. 1995). In this way, researchers can also contextualise the information much more easily and describe the particulars of how things occur in the subsequent analysis.

Within the qualitative paradigm, Community Psychology identifies observational techniques like participant observation, and research methods like participant narratives, case study, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews (Hanlin, et al. 2008) as particularly useful data collection methods to achieve its established research goals. The next section summarises each of these identified qualitative data collection methods.

### **3.2.1.3.1. Participant observation**

Participant observation, a qualitative data collection technique that is commonly associated with ethnographic enquiry, is one particular method that is often employed in research within the community psychology framework, as it facilitates engagement with study participants while contributing to promote values of empowerment and self-determination. Through participant observation, the researcher becomes involved in study participants' daily lives over an extended period of time and uses this vantage point to observe and record the widest range of interactions possible that might help to clarify the research questions. Participant observation is particularly useful in situations where little is known about the social group under study. Although the application of this data collection technique mainly serves to provide detailed (rich) description of a phenomenon and not for theory building purposes, collected information can also serve as a basis to develop new theory about what is actually going on (Robson, 2002).

Some disadvantages and limitations regarding the use of participant observation have been noted, though, in related literature. Besides its time-consuming nature, a common concern is that participant observers may spend their time observing precisely those aspects they as researchers are most interested in, rather than taking in the whole picture, which, naturally, results in a biased picture. Potential to miss important details is enhanced by the fact that male or female observers may only be given access to certain kinds of information depending on the extent to which they are accepted by individuals being researched, owing to factors such as the researcher's appearance, ethnicity, age, gender, and class. Researchers who may never be able to become a full part of the community may end up relying most significantly on key informants, whose interpretation of events may not be entirely representative of other research subjects' views.

#### **3.2.1.3.2. Participant narratives**

Participant narratives, according to Rappaport (1995), are particularly useful for empowerment purposes, as they provide insights into dynamic empowerment processes, opportunities for citizen collaboration, and communal narratives and personal stories, which can be considered empowering resources for those involved. Individual and community narratives provide insights into the lived experiences of marginalised groups. As cited in Hanlin et al. (2008), Rappaport (2000) says that the right to tell one's story is an index of power and psychological empowerment for those who have been denied their voice. This resource becomes more empowering when disempowered individuals have the opportunity to build shared narratives or explore the disempowering effects of dominant cultural narratives on them.

#### **3.2.1.3.3. Case Study**

As Robson (2002) explains, case study method usually involves a reduced number of individual cases that are unique in their content and character to explore a series of focused questions on little known topics in more depth than is usually possible through alternative means. Use of this research method usually begins with one case and then additional cases are selected on the basis of themes arising from the initial case study, to verify and elaborate on previous findings. Although case studies can be a useful means to generate understanding on rare phenomena, this method is often criticised for the fact that knowledge obtained is not necessarily generalisable to the wider population.

#### **3.2.1.3.4. Semi-structured interviews**

Use of semi-structured interviews in research allows researchers to generate a large amount of detailed information regarding the research questions, as may be useful to contextualise collected responses (Bernard 1998). The associated setback



is that answers to open-ended questions may be more difficult to analyse. Coupled with the fact that the interviewer must meet sufficient people to make comparisons, this makes use of this research method time consuming and resource intensive. The informal atmosphere that surrounds this type of interview may encourage respondents to be open and honest, although participants' honesty can't be guaranteed; the flexibility of the interview may diminish reliability of answers provided by respondents. It is also very important to ensure confidentiality, which may be difficult in certain research settings. A significant advantage is that it offers researchers greater flexibility to adjust their questions to respondents' sensitivities and even change the direction of the interview if deemed necessary.

#### **3.2.1.3.5. Focus Group Interview**

The Focus Group Interview is a data collection technique that uses group interaction to elicit information from the group members on specific topics (Morgan, D. 1988). The group is usually composed of anywhere between six to twelve participants who share common characteristics that relate to the chosen topic. The purpose of the Focus Group Interview is to produce qualitative data that provides insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of participants. The researcher usually asks participants to reflect on a series of questions related to the chosen topic (Patton, M. 1987). This author adds that "participants get to hear each other's responses and make additional responses beyond their own initial responses as they hear what other people have to say." The interviewer facilitates expression of subjective content by creating an atmosphere that is conducive to self-disclosure. Data collected through this method is purely descriptive.

These authors highlight the usefulness of Focus Group Interviews to increase validity of findings obtained through other data collection techniques. As such, they are frequently part of mixed method approaches to research. Many times, according

to these various authors, information gathered through group techniques supplements information collected through individually-oriented techniques. In relation to this research, Focus Group Interviews could be a suitable data collection technique in consideration of the fact that certain study participants could feel more uncomfortable about sharing personal information in private, as this could raise suspicions in the rest of the group. However, an inverse criticism that has been noted in related literature is that participants in Focus Group Interviews may also be hesitant about discussing particularly sensitive topics in public. From personal experience facilitating focus group interviews in different contexts, a noted disadvantage is that group members' inputs might be limited by the presence of one or two group members that attempt to dominate the discussion.

#### **3.2.1.3.6. Choice of research methods**

The review of various qualitative research methods that can be profitably applied in research from a socio-ecological perspective led to clarification as to which of these methods might be the most adapted ones to use in this particular research context. Participant observation certainly showed good fit in the selected research site. Through this method, it would be possible to engage undocumented migrants who normally remain out of public view in their natural life setting and observe their spontaneous interactions with nearby others, including other residents, staff members and occasional outsiders that might visit the emergency accommodation. Use of this method would not impose on them a particular behaviour to suit the research agenda but would allow the researcher to capture essential understandings regarding the research questions through the natural flow of casual conversations with different participants.

From the vantage point offered by participant observation methodology, the researcher could also find opportunities for social interaction with participants by simply responding to their specific interests and, in so doing, collect valuable information while providing meaningful support to them at the same time. Another advantage linked to the use of this method is that by spending time with those researched on a daily basis the researcher could also collect as much information as possible about the still little-known social phenomenon of undocumented migration in Spain. Though in the short period granted for PhD fieldwork participant observation would need to focus on particular aspects of participants' experiences, rather than on broader issues, it seemed like this method was particularly well-suited to establish a trusting relationship between researcher and those being researched, as essential to evoke rather intimate topics.

The Focus Group Interview research technique appeared to fit in more naturally in the selected research site since residents were already accustomed to holding weekly group meetings with association staff to discuss problems arising from communal living. This strategy provided another opportunity to come together as a group with the added interest of offering residents a venue to express their particular attitudes, perceptions, and opinions on a range of topics of more personal interest. In this group format, it was expected that discussions would indirectly highlight some of the themes surrounding social connectedness this research was interested in exploring. Those who might not feel inclined to participate in individually-focused research activities could still contribute to the research through their participation in group-oriented activities, thus, enriching the available data.

Another choice of data collection method was to organise informal group outings in the community on a weekly basis in which all residents could freely participate or decide not to take part in. These activities were useful in terms of

providing the researcher with an added opportunity to interact with residents informally and gain further insight into their particular ways of approaching social relationships. In the course of these outings, participants would also naturally display their attitudes about interacting with members of the general public, which could then become the subject of FGI's back at the emergency accommodation.

This choice of research methods seemed to be most adapted to the study population because of their non-imposing, indirect quality, which was an important consideration with a group of undocumented migrants that were not prone to engage in research activities at this juncture. They had far better reasons to be suspect about social relationships in their current circumstances. They also had other important priorities, like finding jobs and a permanent accommodation arrangement in the community, which absorbed most of their attention. Last but not least, residents were sensitive about behaving in ways that did not provoke adverse reactions among those they were sharing their life space with. They knew they were being observed by fellow-residents and that any behaviour that was perceived to be awkward could be construed as affecting the entire group. In this event, they risked being stigmatised by the larger group of residents.

Participant narratives, which could then possibly become shared narratives, would have certainly supplied valuable data regarding the research questions, since it would have offered residents the opportunity to tell their stories about lived experiences in ways that didn't require outward verbal expression. However, since neither English, French, nor Spanish were their native languages, it was questionable whether they would have been able to communicate substantially via these languages in writing, which were the only ones the researcher could understand.

Case study method would have also rendered rich data regarding individual residents' attitudes and perceptions about relating to nearby others. However, undocumented migrants who have been through numerous interviews throughout their migratory journey could, potentially, feel uncomfortable with this procedure as it might remind them of rather intrusive interrogations they had undergone in the past. Others who were not selected for the case study might also become suspicious about the nature of these exchanges, fearing that personal disclosures might affect the entire group and raise the risk of arrest and deportation, which would make the selected candidate feel less at ease in anticipation of possible stigmatisation by his peers after sitting through the interview. Their general approach to relationships of any kind in this environment was characterised by absolute discretion, so, participating in a dyadic interview seemed to be a considerable leap.

Another important consideration when it came to using this method was the issue of representativeness. Although this study didn't aim to achieve generalisability of results obtained, it did aim to make them as representative as possible of the undocumented migrant segment of the population. Case study method, which is often based on a few cases, is often criticised for the fact that knowledge obtained through this method is not necessarily generalisable to the wider population of research interest. Since the sample was already small to begin with (15 potential participants) it seemed like there would be greater advantage in implementing a research method that encompassed the entire group, and, in this way, achieve results that had the highest likelihood of being representative.

Semi-structured interviews, just like case study, would have also provided a large amount of detailed information regarding the topic of interest. It would have, perhaps, contributed to further contextualise the information obtained. However, in this particular research setting, and this was also a concern as far as using other

interviewing methods, like case study, confidentiality couldn't be secured. There were no spaces where researcher and respondent could isolate themselves for this kind of interview at the emergency accommodation. Once again, there were also concerns about implementing interviewing procedures with this type of research population, as any doubts about the objectives of the research could hinder interactions outside of the interview setting. Those who preferred to decline the invitation to participate in the semi-structured interview may adopt this position based on such concerns and, therefore, encourage others to decline the invitation as well.

### **3.3. Data analysis methods in CP research**

Although research from a Community Psychology perspective traditionally draws on the listed qualitative research methods for data collection purposes, there doesn't appear to be a similar list of qualitative data analysis methods that are used to make sense of qualitative data. Consistent with its pragmatic approach, the data analysis technique that would be used to analyse qualitative data within this framework would be the one considered to have best fit with the collected data.

Within the wide range of available qualitative data analysis techniques, a standard analytic technique that would likely be applied in research from an ecological perspective, given its high flexibility, is **Thematic Analysis**. Thematic analysis is basically a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun V. and Clarke, V. 2006). As these authors explain, a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. Thematic analysis is generally concerned with experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants. It can be used to provide a more detailed and nuanced account of one particular theme, or group of themes, within the data.

Themes within qualitative data are usually identified in an inductive way (Creswell, 2009). This means that the identified themes are data driven and not based on the researcher's analytic preconceptions of what that data says. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that researcher neutrality has to be questioned, since researchers cannot disengage from their theoretical commitments when they focus on particular themes. They should make those theoretical commitments explicit. Thematic analysis also involves application of an iterative approach to make sense of the data, by which what is meant is that the researcher doesn't usually collect all the required data at once and then analyse it, but, rather, collects and reflects upon a portion of collected data before engaging in successive waves of data collection. Analysis carried out in this fashion often leads to refinement or even to reformulation of research questions, which then orient the next wave of data collection, while freshly collected data may further refine or even alter the identified themes.

Thematic analysis is facilitated by categorising identified themes under different labels that are then given a code name, thus, enabling the researcher to link any additional data that appears relevant to those listed themes to any one of the existing codes (Miles and Huberman 1994). As this iterative process continues, the researcher can gradually merge the coded themes by establishing links between their respective contents, which results in a reduced set of specialised code headings. Eventually, this constant back and forth movement leads to a point of data saturation, i.e. where new data does not add significantly to what has already been clarified (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The remaining list of themes constitutes the major findings of the research. A final analytic step involved in thematic analysis consists in linking findings with existing theory on the topic to highlight similarities and differences across different sets of findings.

Thematic analysis bears some resemblance with the **Grounded Theory** approach to data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This strategy, as formulated by these authors, is mainly concerned with the development of theory about the situation being studied. In order to achieve its theory-building aim, it proposes a similar set of procedures and techniques to collect and analyse data but which must be followed fairly systematically. Data is usually collected through interviews with study respondents, although other methods, including quantitative methods, are not excluded (Robson, 2002). This occurs at different stages of the research, in such a way as to allow the researcher to withdraw from the research setting at convenient points to analyse the collected data in specific ways, much in the same way as with thematic analysis. The new theory that derives from this process is considered 'grounded' for the fact that it emerges from the study itself and not from a different source, e.g. existing theory (Robson, 2002).

This approach appears particularly suited to develop an understanding of complex issues, which normally requires plenty of pauses, reflection, and follow up to grasp in their full dimension. Mindful as well about the paucity of specific theories regarding undocumented migrant wellbeing, grounded theory could be a convenient strategy to fill in existing theoretical gaps. Nevertheless, close adherence to this form of enquiry usually requires a larger sample size than what was possible for this study, i.e. 30-40 (Robson, 2002) rather than 15. It is also possible to incorporate some aspects of this approach while ignoring others (Robson, 2002).

### **3.3.1. Quantitative methods in CP research**

Although purely quantitative means are rarely used to collect meaningful data on social phenomena and then make sense of it in research conducted within Community Psychology's ecological framework, this perspective's flexible research



stance allows researchers to adopt mixed method approaches that include quantitative measures (Hanlin et al. 2008). There is sufficient admission to the fact that each approach might compensate for weaknesses of the other. Such procedures might involve use of sociometric or psychometric measures, which are then basically analysed according to the measure's proposed interpretive strategy. This broader perspective appeared advantageous for this study, as certain study participants might not be willing to openly discuss personal issues and prefer to provide answers to a set of listed questions.

### **3.4. Procedure**

#### **3.4.1. Research inception**

As proposed by the migrant support association's managers who were responsible for the operation of the emergency accommodation where this study took place, this researcher signed a volunteer contract to provide psychosocial support to the group of residents before starting this research. The agreement was to extend this contract over a 5-month period, between February 2010 and July 2010, and collect necessary data to inform the research questions while implementing support activities. A Social Studies Research Centre that works in partnership with this association agreed to provide necessary oversight throughout the research and review the finished document before final approval, for quality assurance purposes.

The strong recommendation to develop a dual facilitator-researcher role suggested that participant observation, and, more specifically, the modality of *participant as observer*<sup>7</sup> might be the most suitable research method to collect data in this particular context. At the outset, especially, participant observation appeared

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<sup>7</sup> In this form of participant observation, participants are fully aware of the fact that they are being studied while the researcher is involved in their lives (Kawulich, B. 2005).

to be a suitable method to gain an initial approximation to the study group before deciding upon complementary research methods that might be useful to explore the research questions in more depth. Another important advantage associated to the application of participant observation as an entry point in this particular context was the opportunity it offered to interact informally with study participants on a regular basis, as could be crucial to build trust with individuals who might otherwise remain quite distrustful if contact with the researcher was more sporadic and formal.

The agreed upon support and research plan was presented to all emergency accommodation residents by the migrant association's director at their weekly communal meeting. This was the first direct contact between the researcher and the group of residents at the selected research site. The emergency accommodation was a large and old flat situated on the first floor of a five-story ancient building located in one of Barcelona's medieval quarters. It was divided between an office space for administrative staff and a combination of twin and bunk bedrooms with capacity for 15 occupants. On one side of the flat, and opening up onto a large terrace, there was a large communal area containing a long dinner table, sofas, and a large TV. Other spaces included a large kitchen where residents could cook their meals and two bathroom/shower rooms on either side of the flat.

### **3.4.2. Implementation of the participant observation**

The participant observation at the selected research site took place on a daily basis, (except weekends) as previously agreed with the association's managers. Residents were free to fix their daily routines except for the fact that, according to house rules, it was compulsory to leave the hostel by 8.30 am after breakfast and not return before lunchtime at 14.00. This rule was meant to encourage residents to be out in the community exploring available job and training opportunities, since the migrant support association was unable to offer residents community reintegration

support due to its limited financial budget. After lunch they could come and go as they wished until bedtime. Most did return for lunch and dinner on a regular basis, since this allowed them to save on food expenditure.

In view of this daily routine, the most convenient time of day to conduct the participant observation was during the afternoon period, between 2.30 pm and the evening meal at 7 pm. The fact that at this point most rallied around a sports programme on TV offered a good opportunity to engage in casual conversations with different residents, usually centred on sport topics. They were all well-documented about the Spanish football league, the different teams and players, their strengths and weaknesses, and had their team preferences. However, at the end of this TV programme, some left the hostel while others went back to their rooms, either to nap or listen to music. Still, some remained in the communal living area, to watch another TV show or simply stretch out on the available sofa. It was with these residents that it was possible to engage in more substantial communication at this early stage of the participant observation.

Although at this early stage most contacts concentrated on a reduced number of residents, it seemed convenient as far as being able to more easily become familiarised with some of the pressing issues undocumented migrants were confronted with at this time and also to build trust that could then be extended to the rest of the group. Most communications with residents took place in Spanish, except in those cases where certain residents had not yet acquired basic fluency in this language and preferred to speak in either English or French, depending on the African country they were originally from. Eventually, though, it became clear that there was need to adjust the participant observation's initial schedule to be able to more regularly engage with the larger group of study participants.

After learning that one resident was appointed to kitchen duty over the course of a week, the decision was made to arrive earlier to accompany this resident during his chore and then share the lunch meal with all residents. During this period, the generally neophyte cook shared his unease about preparing a meal for 14 other very demanding residents, who didn't hesitate to openly criticise what he had made. In the context of this minor collaboration, (although at times it was major) it was possible to engage appointed cooks in casual conversations on food related topics, like culinary traditions in culture of origin, places to buy home country foods in Barcelona, or most qualified cooks in the flat, which led to greater personal disclosures.

As the participant observation progressed, it was also possible to collaborate more closely with hostel administrators as they needed assistance to cover intake interviews with new admissions to the flat. These exchanges helped gain further insight on residents' backgrounds. At times, it was necessary to accompany a resident or a number of different residents to a medical appointment or to the immigration office. Despite this multiplication of in-house contacts some residents remained quite elusive. The only way to engage with all residents seemed to be to diversify available support options. For this reason, I made a mini-laptop available for public use while present at the flat, with a sense that most residents would prefer to save on the cost of internet connection at available cyber-centres and that this activity would offer plenty of opportunities for social interaction.

The mini-laptop became quickly popular among all residents, to the point that a schedule for its use had to be developed so that each resident could have access to it. There were no lack of requests for assistance to explore online job search databases, fill out online CV's in correct Spanish, and even sign up to social media from residents with whom there had so far been scarce if any contact. Increased

interaction with study participants around their daily computer usage helped to build enough trust between researcher and residents to envision further joint activities. One noteworthy aspect at this stage of the participant observation was that despite the fact that residents shared their living space and seemed to have plenty more in common with each other, there was scarce interaction between them. Most residents restricted their contacts to same country nationals, if there were any at the emergency accommodation; otherwise, they appeared alone most of the time.

To clarify the reasons behind the diversity of social responses displayed by study participants was, precisely, the main objective of this research. However, it seemed like something else than what had been tried thus far was needed to draw out these reasons. At this point, it was, therefore, considered appropriate to launch the idea of a weekly support group for all residents during which they could exchange their views on topics of general interest, recognise each other's needs and support each other. In the course of these exchanges, it would be possible to take a close up view of group interactions and steer group members' attention towards topics of interest to this research, which could then be explored in further depth in the context of Focus Group Interviews.

Another proposal that was set forth at this time that was also meant to tease out critical aspects influencing undocumented migrants' social relationships was to organise weekend group outings in the community to places of common interest. During these activities, it would be possible to observe how each group member responded to other participants and grasp some themes underlying their particular responses. Some might engage in increased interaction with each other following these activities, demonstrating that, as long as social resources were made available, they were inclined to connect. Others might still remain detached, thus, bringing differences in social connectedness patterns among study participants into

sharper focus and facilitating exploration of underlying factors that might explain these differences.

Administrators welcomed these ideas and were willing to take action to put them into practice. They made attendance to the weekly support group mandatory for all residents, with the expectation that it would help them diffuse accumulated stress and improve in-house relationships. They otherwise considered that if attendance wasn't required, certain residents would only attend irregularly, if at all, given the multiple demands in their life at the present time, and this might undermine the value of the group for those who might be more interested in attending. Absences, therefore, had to be justified, at a risk of collecting a fault for non-attendance; three faults meant expulsion from the flat. Throughout the five-month long participant observation, it was possible to hold eight support group meetings with emergency accommodation residents (see an example of weekly support group in appendix section). The association was otherwise willing to provide basic funding for weekend group outings, of which six took place. Although residents' attendance to these activities fluctuated, their participation or lack of participation helped to highlight important themes regarding social connections.

An important theme that emerged once the support group had been meeting for several weeks relates to study participants' views on trust. By all appearances, this issue seemed to hold high relevance for the majority of study participants, since they immediately began an intense debate over the appropriateness of trusting others or not (see example of weekly support group on trust in appendix section). Apparently, the topic of trust had hit a raw nerve with all study participants. Trust was, precisely, one of the major issues that had been highlighted in the literature review on undocumented migrant networks given their acquired social vulnerability in the transnational context. The subjective experience of interpersonal trust can be

considered one of several important levels of analysis within the social ecological perspective that guides this research. It, therefore, seemed appropriate to take advantage of this opportunity to explore this particular topic as it specifically related to this group of undocumented migrants of African origin. The Focus Group Interview method lent itself appropriately to generate further discussion on the trust issue. Therefore, the five remaining weekly sessions before the conclusion of the fieldwork became FGI's on the specific topic of trust.

Since the topic of trust had emerged from the participants themselves, and they seemed motivated enough to develop this topic further without prodding them with a pre-defined set of questions, the decision was made to allow the discussion on trust to proceed in the direction they found most appropriate, with the expectation that this approach might render the most valuable insights about their attitudes, perceptions, and opinions regarding trust. This approach did not exclude the possibility of inserting spontaneous questions in the course of discussions to help participants further clarify and amplify their particular points of view. At the following week's focused interview meeting, participants confirmed that they didn't require any cueing to discuss the topic of trust. Questions by the researcher served to moderate the discussion in ways that ensured that each participant had a chance to speak.

By the third focus group interview, it appeared as if a portion of participants felt they had gone overboard in their expressions on a sensitive topic like trust and opted to not attend the scheduled meeting. However, from the researcher's perspective, there was much more to discuss on this topic. In order to bring appropriately closure to this interesting discussion, study participants were asked in the course of the following all-house weekly meeting if they'd be willing, on an entirely voluntary basis, to fill out a survey on trust which the researcher had identified in the literature and considered appropriate to stimulate further discussion

on this topic. The selected survey instrument is the Propensity to Trust Survey (PTS), which is an original survey to measure trust developed by Anthony Evans (2007). The decision to use this particular measure in the context of this study was not based on considerations regarding its reliability or validity, as the version used in this study was still in its piloting stage.

The PTS contains two scales that independently measure psychological differences underlying the compound traits of trust and trustworthiness. A measure of trustworthiness is included because, while developing the measure, one of the survey developer's major findings was that trust is inconceivable without trustworthiness, i.e. both the trustor and trustee are mutually influenced by the other's show of trust. The PTS also asks respondents to describe how they typically act in a number of trust-related situations. As explained by the developer of this instrument, the items of the PTS (for both the trust scale and trustworthiness scale) are based on the International Personality Item Pool, (Goldberg, 2006) a popular psychometric technique that elicits attitudes about cooperation, society, and morality. These items, in turn, derive from the five major personality domains as described in the Big Five model:

1. Extraversion: reflects positive affect and confidence
2. Agreeableness: measure of cooperation and social good-nature.
3. Neuroticism: measurement of emotional stability versus worrying
4. Conscientiousness: measures dependability and responsibility.
5. Openness to experience: measure of cultural and intellectual open-mindedness.

After presenting potential respondents with an information sheet that explained the survey's contents and giving them the option to decline participation, thirteen out of fourteen residents showed up at the agreed upon time with consent forms duly



signed to fill out the survey. Since the PTS original version is in English, it was translated into Spanish for those residents who might not have English as one of their native languages. Implementation of this survey shed further light on the relevance of trust to understand study participants' social connectedness patterns.

### **3.4.3. Process summary**

What started as a participant observation ended up being a mixed method research as a result of the specific issues raised throughout the research process. Participant observation provided an adequate means to engage with the selected study group in a minimally invasive, neutral, and open-ended fashion that helped to reduce self-guardedness. As trust grew between researcher and study participants through the implementation of the researcher's dual role, it was then possible to propose a set of group-oriented activities through which to gain further insights into the research questions. These included weekly support groups, weekend group outings in the community, focus group interviews and the administration of a trust survey to all residents who were willing to participate. Although attendance was irregular by certain residents, that in itself provided some indications about issues surrounding social connectedness within undocumented migrant groups.

### **3.4.4. Data recording, storage, and protection**

(See appendix section for examples of field notes)

For the fact that it was difficult to keep regular field notes while conducting the participant observation at the emergency accommodation, daily observations and specific contents of interactions and conversations with study participants, which constitute the raw data required to inform the research questions, were recorded immediately after each daily visit to the emergency accommodation by filling in a dated, computer-based file containing a pre-defined list of knowledge categories

(see attached template).<sup>8</sup> Chunks of collected information were fitted under their corresponding knowledge category. Names were anonymised and further potentially identifying information was left out, as required to ensure participants' confidentiality in accordance with the agreed terms of consent to participate in the study. The completed computer-based file for a given day was then transferred to the QMU password protected Z: drive for safe storage. To obtain audio recordings of weekly support group meetings or focus group discussions was not a feasible option in this research site as this proposal would have likely met some resistance by at least some participants who preferred to limit their self-exposure.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

Although there is still much room for theorising in relation to undocumented migrants, the aim of this study was not to develop new theory, as this would hardly be possible given the limited size of the study group and its inherent diversity. To achieve this aim would have also required more detailed information on particular issues that were difficult to explore in necessary depth with study participants within the short time frame provided for fieldwork within a PhD thesis. The general aim of this research, rather, is to highlight a series of key issues related to undocumented migrant wellbeing that deserve further research attention, given their perceived relevance for undocumented migrants, as well as to suggest a way by which these issues might be conveniently researched. With this goal in mind, Thematic Analysis rather than a Grounded Theory approach to analysis appeared to offer a convenient method to analyse qualitative data collected in this research.

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix section for an example of field notes, totalling 88 files over the 5-month period.

### **3.5.1. Thematic analysis**

Use of Thematic Analysis provided necessary guidance to analyse collected data recorded in daily field notes on a bi-weekly basis, regardless of the amount of new data available. Initially, recorded data was scanned in order to consolidate the available information under each pre-established knowledge category included on the reporting form, which had been defined according to particular aspects the researcher deemed interesting to explore. After solidifying the collected data under each knowledge category, data that appeared irrelevant was discarded. Following this data cleaning procedure, the edited field notes were rescanned in search of existing themes. Particular attention was given to those themes that bore some relationship with the research questions, although there was also consideration for other types of themes in anticipation of the possibility that different kinds of information might highlight other important issues. Although the Community Psychology framework served as basic theoretical reference to make sense of the data, at this stage, what was important was to let the data speak for itself and capture the meanings individual study participants gave to their experiences.

Once a number of different themes were identified in the first batch of reviewed field notes, they were given an initial code name for classification purposes. Subsequent reflection on these coded themes led to the formulation of new questions worth exploring with study participants during future visits to the emergency accommodation. At each new two-week interval, an identical data cleaning procedure was carried out at the outset of analysis. However, while exploring themes in the second step, particular attention was given to identify themes in the field notes that corresponded with the previously defined coded themes so as to merge newly obtained information with older information. This analytic procedure had the effect of either confirming the validity of the previously

defined code structure or modifying it by suggesting more appropriate code names. Further questions elicited by reflecting on defined codes were then explored with study participants in the context of casual conversations, weekly support groups or Focus Group Interviews.

The last phase of data analysis took place following the fieldwork's conclusion. At this stage, effort was made to merge the available codes as much as possible in order to simplify the overall code structure. With reference to this simplified code structure, it was then possible to establish a hierarchy of basic findings. An initial step towards bringing these basic findings out of their raw form and into second level findings consisted in elaborating them in writing, which allowed further recognition of existing links between different themes. For further clarification of these more refined findings, but also to address existing information gaps, these findings were finally triangulated with findings in secondary sources, like undocumented migrant published accounts of their migration experiences, press articles focused on undocumented migrants in Spain, and similar research carried out with undocumented migrants in different cultural contexts. (SEE ATTACHED CODING STRUCTURE IN APPENDIX SECTION).

### **3.5.2. Analysis of Propensity to Trust Survey Results**

In accordance with the measure's implicit analytic strategy, in the first stage of analysis the numerical values checked by the total number of survey participants for each item (from 1 to 6) were added up to determine the most frequent response for each survey item across the entire group of survey respondents. The second step of analysis consisted in defining the identified dominant responses according to the personality domains that best describe them, e.g. agreeableness, neuroticism. For example, if the majority response to the survey item: "Am not interested in other people's problems" was 1 (very inaccurate), that dominant response was labelled

“agreeableness”, i.e. most were interested in other people’s problems and this feeling of solidarity towards others showed that most were agreeable. Agreeableness is positively associated with trust, indicating that most respondents maintained some degree of trust in social relationships. Those who would reply 6 (very accurate) would likely be quite distrustful.

The total frequency of each personality domain was then calculated in order to then graph the hierarchy of personality domains within this particular group of survey respondents, which reflected the existing variation in available trust among study participants. However, to simply confirm this variation wasn’t the ultimate goal of using this particular survey method in this research. It was used, rather, to facilitate exploration of individually-based factors involved in trust maintenance that were difficult to explore by alternative means and which could help explain the existing variation in available trust. The results obtained through the administration of the PTS were used as a starting point to analyse, with reference to related literature, the links between certain personality features and trust.

### **3.6. Ethical considerations**

#### **3.6.1. Issues of consent**

Aware of study participants’ likely high sensitivity towards the idea of taking part in a research study in their current situational circumstances, it was important to obtain their free, prior and informed consent to participate in this research. Consent was obtained by providing potential study participants with the following information, according to standard procedures:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Revised Research Ethics Guidelines, Procedures and Regulations. Queen Margaret University. Dec. 2008

- Information regarding the researcher's specific support responsibilities, including: acting as point of information and orientation, providing individual counselling, organising group activities, social accompaniment, language tutoring and mediation with public services for all residents regardless of their participation in the research.
- Information, both orally and in writing, about the purpose of the planned research, planned research procedures, and potential risks and benefits associated with their involvement in this research.
- Information regarding the possibility to refuse participation or opt out at any point during the study after accepting to participate without having to give a reason and with no risk of undue consequences to them.
- Information regarding specific steps to be taken throughout the entire duration of the study to preserve study participants' confidentiality, including anonymising data, safe data storage, and non-revelation of study participants' identity to strangers.
- Information regarding the researcher's and hostel administrators' availability to address any concerns or questions they may have at any time regarding the research.

All fifteen residents immediately accepted to participate in this research without further question. This immediate positive reaction from the entire group deserved some pondering. It raised concern about whether consent provided was, indeed, genuine consent. A widely acknowledged difficulty in research with research subjects who may find themselves, socially-speaking, in a position of diminished autonomy concerns their ability to provide unrestrained consent (Connolly, P. 2003). By all evidence, this was the situation in which participants in this study were found. For one, they were residing at an emergency accommodation run by a local migrant

support association as their sole housing option after losing their established living arrangements with members of their available social networks. Their immediate consent to participate in this research could, therefore, reflect their concerns over possible negative consequences that might derive from their refusal to consent. Perhaps, they would be looked upon unsympathetically by association administrators, who had the power to deny them much needed supports.

Another important consideration concerned the fact that study participants may have felt obliged to consent in order to fully benefit from the observer's participant role. Researchers are often perceived as having power to effect change at both an individual and community level (Pittaway et al. 2010). These combined factors were sufficient to suspect that, at least to some extent, their decision to participate may have been strongly influenced by their acquired dependency on the supporting association and their expectations of being able to benefit from further support provided by the researcher. Added to this pressure, it must be noted as well that study participants were already dragging a rather lengthy experience of living under rather oppressive conditions because of their undocumented status. Especially the younger residents may not have been used to asserting their personal views in this adverse social environment.

The ethical dilemma of implementing a research study with a group of vulnerable people without being able to confirm the genuinely voluntary nature of their consent to participate raised the question as to what else could have been done beyond standard procedure to minimise potential sense of obligation to participate. While exploring alternatives to resolve this ethical dilemma, it seemed highly unlikely, on one hand, that study participants would be willing to disclose any real concerns they might have regarding their participation at this early stage of the research. On the other hand, it seemed likely that a more individualised approach to

verify their perceptions may have inhibited them still further, as they wouldn't have had the group's coverage to fall back on. It was also plausible to consider that their apparent willingness to participate expressed a vote of confidence that their involvement in the research would, at least, not undermine their interests. Therefore, the research went ahead but not without a sense that the seeming ambiguity surrounding their consent to participate was entirely resolved.

### **3.6.2. Potential to cause participants further distress**

To involve vulnerable people who are highly dependent on the relief community in research always carries the potential of causing them further distress (Leaning, 2001). There was certainly potential for this negative outcome in relation to the target sample in their current life situation. Several risks were noted:

- Any in-depth exploration of sensitive topics with different study participants while caught in highly adverse social circumstances carried the potential of raising unrealistic expectations of what the researcher might do to provide necessary relief, only to feel let down upon realising that those expectations weren't entirely satisfied.
- The fact that encounters between researcher and individual participants in this study normally had to take place in a shared living space also raised the ethical issue of confidentiality; nearby others might overhear the contents of rather intimate discussions that were not meant for public consumption and use that information in ways that caused those who shared their stories further distress.
- Given tight control exercised by the peer group concerning what is appropriate to communicate to outsiders, individual participants could be taking considerable risks by making certain disclosures to a researcher from the local population, as any breach of group norms could stigmatise them further within their peer group. Quite clearly, all participants had contended with issues of discrimination and



stigmatisation since arrival in context, so it was very important to ensure they weren't exposed to similar experiences within their primary group, as a backlash of their involvement in this research.

Reflection on these anticipated risks led to consideration that participant observation could be the most appropriate method to launch the data collection process at this research site. By use of this method, it was possible to approach study participants in a minimally intrusive way that helped remove any stress that some residents might have in connection to their participation in the research. It was important to make them feel they could behave as they normally would even when the researcher was present and that included not engaging in contact with the researcher if they so wished. The weekly support group and focus group discussions that were introduced as complementary methods to study the research questions were also intended to provide a safe environment in which study participants could engage in discussions around sensitive topics. When a resident wished to share something in private with the researcher, the conversation was often taken discreetly outdoors.

### **3.7. Limitations**

One of the main limitations involved in this study was that some study participants were so reclusive that it was hard to engage them in meaningful discussions that could help clarify their issues concerning social relationships. The possibility of engaging them for this purpose required a sensitive approach over an extended period of time, which was not feasible in the context of this PhD fieldwork. Even with regards to those participants who appeared more open towards others, the fact that contacts between researcher and those being researched took place at the emergency accommodation, where there was little sense of privacy, precluded

the development of more intimate conversations that might have helped to further clarify relevant aspects.

Although it may have been possible to encourage study participants to engage in interviews outside of the emergency accommodation, where they may have felt safer, the researcher didn't wish to leave the impression among study participants that they were being lured to a face-to-face encounter with the researcher they might not feel entirely comfortable with. Every attempt was made to not put a tentative (delicate) cohabitation between researcher and those being researched at further risk. Neither did it seem reasonable to instil in participants a sense that an invitation to meet outside of the emergency accommodation was, in fact, an invitation to fraternize.

Another possible limitation of this methodological approach is that some study participants could exit the emergency accommodation at short notice, either because they suddenly found alternative living arrangements or were expelled due to violation of major house rules, or even repeated failure to respect house rules. Regular changes in the study group's composition made it difficult to base the findings of this research on in-depth discussions. Even those who remained at the emergency accommodation throughout the entire 3-month period granted to them by the association could have been anticipating to move at any moment before that, and, therefore, preferred to not invest themselves in this research. For this reason, it became necessary to rely more strongly on observational research methods and triangulate findings with secondary sources.

Language was certainly a limitation in this study, since several research participants were not entirely fluent in any of the languages that the researcher speaks. This factor made it difficult to capture the meanings that certain participants

gave to their current experiences. Every effort was made to ensure appropriate translation, although this could never be entirely accurate.

## **Chapter 4 – Living out the dream**

This chapter describes study participants' migratory trajectories before arriving at the emergency accommodation in Barcelona where this research was conducted. An exploration of their experiences at different stages of their migratory project prior to arriving at this juncture appears relevant to elucidate key factors that, separately or cumulatively, could be influencing their personal disposition to engage in social relationships in this new life setting. This retrospective examination was aided by application of the transnational approach, as this perspective encompasses relevant factors at both migrants' place of origin and international destination (Flores-Yeffal, 2013). Complementary application of Migrant Systems and Networks theory (Castles and Miller, 2009), as cited in O'Reilly (2012) directed attention towards specific factors at micro, meso, and macro levels, as defined in the literature review. Study participants accounts of their experiences prior to the arrival at the emergency accommodation were generally fragmented, as was otherwise understandable given their current level of self-guardedness and life burdens. Despite the limitations of employing a transnational approach with this study group, it was possible to identify common themes associated with their individual migratory trajectories, and fill remaining information gaps with reference to published accounts by previously undocumented migrant authors from the same African region.

### **4.1. Pre-migration pressures**

The large majority of study participants reported that they came from small towns or villages in their country's rural or coastal areas. They described similar contextual features despite originating in different African countries. For

example, they all described their communities as poor due to lack of state or private sector financial investments. National banks did not offer loans either to facilitate expansion of small local businesses. Their families, consequently, relied mainly on manual labour jobs in the agriculture, fishing, or small trade sectors to secure their livelihoods. Since, according to study participants, these were low paying jobs, all able-bodied family members were expected to work and then pool their resources to cover household expenses. They also explained that this mechanism was necessary in consideration of the seasonal nature of these jobs, causing certain family members to become unemployed during periods of varying length. In the view of different study participants, this economic reality was not likely to change in the foreseeable future.

Some of the more politically aware study participants mentioned the advent of a globalised economy as a key factor in further economic decline in their areas of origin. Trade agreements signed between their countries and the EU towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were, reportedly, largely unfavourable to local, family-run businesses. The changes brought about by globalisation on local economies were otherwise quite evident. Study participants from Senegal cited the example of local fishermen now having to work at a greater distance from shore because of the presence of larger foreign boats fishing in their country's territorial waters, causing them to increase their fuel expenditure. Farmers in the back country that depended mostly on a single crop were equally affected as they now had to compete with a wider range of imported agricultural goods on local markets, which obliged them to lower their prices. Family members were no longer needed as regularly in family-run businesses as the output volume and profit generated decreased drastically.

These developments led to prolonged unemployment and a sense of stagnation among many local workers, especially youth, as local governments did not remedy

their economic disadvantage. Faced with resulting economic uncertainty, many members of rural and fishing communities started to migrate towards larger, in-country urban centres in search for jobs, where they often had to live in peripheral and unsanitary areas. In these contexts they learned about the demand for cheap labour in neighbouring countries, and, since they had already become uprooted from their original locations and did not gain significantly through internal migration, they chose to explore this option. Since many same-country nationals were already settled in neighbouring countries, this factor also reassured new candidates for migration that they would be welcomed and assisted to settle upon arrival. This was the social reality that study participants faced in their respective communities when they became of age.

Current literature focusing on patterns of West African migration (de Haas, H. 2008) documents the increasing number of migrants from this region that are progressing beyond neighbouring countries in which they have settled to reach the European Union, joining migrants from the North African Maghreb region heading in the same direction. Satellite TV and other media channels projecting images of an easier life in Europe apparently exercises an irresistible influence, especially on African youths that feel very connected to European football. This northerly movement is propelled by the fact that Sub Saharan migrants continue to encounter limited employment opportunities in reception countries and are continually harassed by police, which prevents their social integration. As a result of these migration patterns, an increasing number of West African candidates for migration now make plans to reach Europe before leaving their country of origin.

Due to the increased number of Sub Saharan African migrants already settled in Europe, new candidates for migration from West African countries can now receive information from social contacts based in Europe about the existence of

specific jobs they can access, which encourages them to implement their migration plans. Even though they know beforehand that these jobs will be poorly paid, this fact does not discourage them. They know that whatever amount they earn will far exceed what they could make in similar jobs locally. As Lai recalled, a common comparison that he heard in his community of origin was that the earnings of two days of work in Europe were the equivalent of two months of work in home country.

Combined with these pull factors motivating migration to Europe from the West African region, there are also numerous push factors that propel candidates for migration in this particular direction. The theory of *cumulative causation* (Myrdal, 1957, Massey, 1990) as cited in Flores-Yeffal (2013) can be useful to understand social dynamics that propel individuals to migrate transnationally from this African region. This theory explains that migration will naturally occur as community members notice the significantly improved economic and social status of those families that are receiving regular remittances from family members living abroad. The desire to migrate in similar direction is further reinforced when returning migrants show signs of economic success, which also affords them higher respect in the community.

Abu's remarks appear in line with this theory as he stated that he felt encouraged to migrate upon noticing that seemingly successful returning migrants in his community were working in the same menial jobs he was involved in before they migrated transnationally. Stark and Taylor (1989) also cited in Flores-Yeffal (2013) refer to this social phenomenon as *relative deprivation*. If, as was the case in most of the communities study participants came from, a majority of community members had migrated to a European destination, it was understandable that they would wish to follow in the same steps.

#### 4.1.1. Few alternatives to international migration

As the theory of *cumulative causation* further explains, this social dynamic gradually becomes self-perpetuating in sending communities, as it fosters a culture of migration. Mou, a Senegalese undocumented migrant, confirmed the existence of a culture of migration in his community by stating that: *“Senegalese families have the expectation that at least one family member will migrate transnationally and bring something back for the family”*. He added that to have a family member living abroad is, actually, a source of family prestige for Senegalese families. With this kind of pressure, migration could be considered practically a social obligation in his country, especially for young males. He made it very clear that if young males refused this option without being able to offer a viable alternative, they would likely be stigmatised by their families and entire communities. Sai, from the same country, confirmed these extremes by adding that: *“when you don’t have money in Senegal, not even your parents respect you”*. Many other study participants from different countries seemed to confirm these extremes as they reported feeling pressured by their families to migrate transnationally. In fact, most started thinking about migrating well before they actually migrated. It becomes clear that whether young males in these communities wish to migrate or not, they may have little choice in the matter when considering the absence of viable alternatives to improve their and their family’s economic wellbeing.

At a more individual level, as reported by several different participants in this study, there were also a number of additional considerations that made transnational migration appear as the most reasonable way forward to them. At their stage in life they would have to significantly delay the fulfilment of important cultural rites of passage into adulthood, like marrying and forming a family of their own, as they lacked sufficient income to cover the high cost of marriage dowries and home



property. Another major consideration expressed by study participants was not being able to offer their own children a better life than the one they had while growing up. They hoped to at least offer them the opportunity to complete their basic education, which most of them had been unable to complete.

#### **4.1.2. Factors enabling relocation**

Despite their motivation to migrate internationally, study participants still had to find the means of funding their journey at a time in their lives when they still had not accumulated enough personal savings. A complicating factor at this point, in light of the high demand in their countries of origin for visas to access European countries, was reportedly that European country embassies, in coordination with national ministerial authorities, were only issuing visas to those applicants that could show proof of employment upon arrival. Without this pre-requisite, the only way to implement their migration plans in the shorter term was to travel without an entry visa via the maritime route, paying smugglers that transfer migrants to Europe by boat the required fee for a place on board. In Hai's words, *"the dinghy was the only solution"*.

Except for those study participants that came from countries like Senegal or Morocco, from where they can cross to Southern Spain or the Spanish Canary Islands directly from their country's coastline, the remaining study participants first had to travel lengthy overland routes before reaching boat departure points. This alternative overland-maritime travel route raised the cost of the trip considerably. Evidently, study participants that were employed tried to save up as much as possible of job income for this purpose, which delayed their departure. Some even moved to larger urban areas within country in search for better paying jobs to fund

their transnational journey, as so many other community members had done in the past.

However, if they had relied entirely on personal savings to get started on their journey, they would have likely had to delay their migration plans for several years. Study participants referred to their tight-knit communities' tradition of mutual solidarity as a vital resource to materialise their transnational migration plans. Migration, according to several study participants, is the type of life project that stimulates solidarity among family, including extended family, and the wider community, as all expect to draw some benefit from it over the longer term. A majority of study participants described the following methods by which their family and friends, both in country and in the transnational context, helped to get their migration journey underway.

At a local level, family members often sold portions of their available property, e.g. agricultural/fishing equipment, a portion of land, jewellery, or even engaged in loan agreements with money lenders, granting property as collateral. As Ama expressed, *"you gamble everything you have"*. Friends in the community also contributed a small part in some cases, expecting that, perhaps, their support would result in community improvements or that they might eventually need these contacts when a member in their own family decided to migrate in the same direction. Study participants, evidently, entered into contact with other prospective migrants who were preparing their outward journey about the same time and shared relevant information required to plan their journey.

A few, nevertheless, said that they decided to bypass family and community support altogether, either because they felt it would be too hard to say goodbye to their families and neighbours or because they anticipated that certain family

members would not approve of their plans given the well-known risks involved in travelling to Europe via overland-maritime routes. As Sai said: *“I didn’t tell my mother until I had left.”* These participants were, therefore, obliged to supplement their available savings by recourse to local money lenders specialising in loans to migrants. Study participants could also rely upon already migrated family members or close friends for essential information regarding available jobs, routes to follow to reach Europe, and people to contact along the way to simplify their passage. They also made arrangements with them to stay at their place upon arrival. In some instances, these foreign contacts even helped to fund portions of their journey.

Whichever way, these support-seeking patterns are consistent with what has been noted in related migration literature, which highlights the basic fact that individuals migrate thanks to the social capital available to them, both locally and transnationally (Flores-Yeffal, 2013). They also migrate because they feel confident that they will be able to continue drawing on social capital through their established contacts after arrival at destination.

#### **4.1.3. Human capital and aspirations**

A majority of study participants had not completed their secondary education. They were skilled at manual labour jobs, primarily in sectors like fishing and agriculture. They felt, nevertheless, that they had their youth and strong desire to explore different opportunities in their favour. Their common aspirations were, in the short-term, to find employment that would allow them to both sustain themselves in Spain/Europe and send remittances to their families on a regular basis. Over the mid-term, they expected to earn sufficient earnings to visit their families back in home country from time to time and use these visits to prepare their eventual return by starting or extending local businesses and purchasing home property. Long-term

goals were to build enough savings to settle back in home country, get married, and carry on with established local businesses.

They had no set time frame to achieve these aims, only the will to make as much money as possible in the shortest period of time so that they could return home sooner and carry on with their life projects. Although they knew they would have difficulties to save money during the initial period of settlement, they also expected to eventually access training in different trades and, through this channel, eventually access higher paying jobs. Many had developed an interest in football and, therefore, hoped to integrate European football teams.

#### **4.1.4. Migration routes**

Participants in this study were divided between those who boarded dinghies along their country's coastline, i.e. Senegalese and Moroccan nationals, who, therefore, did not have to travel extensively to reach the dinghy's launching point, and those who came from African countries further East, i.e. Mali, and South, i.e. Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, who had to travel to either Libya or Morocco transiting through numerous intervening countries and the Sahara desert on buses, lorries and even by foot, where necessary. The latter portion opted to reach Morocco as the sea crossing route from this country's Atlantic coastline to the Spanish Canary Islands had become popular among migrants in 2006, when most of them arrived. Spain had effectively managed to close its land borders with Morocco at its small North African enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta a year earlier by setting up a bladed fence after the so-called "fence crisis" (Ovalle, R. 2014).

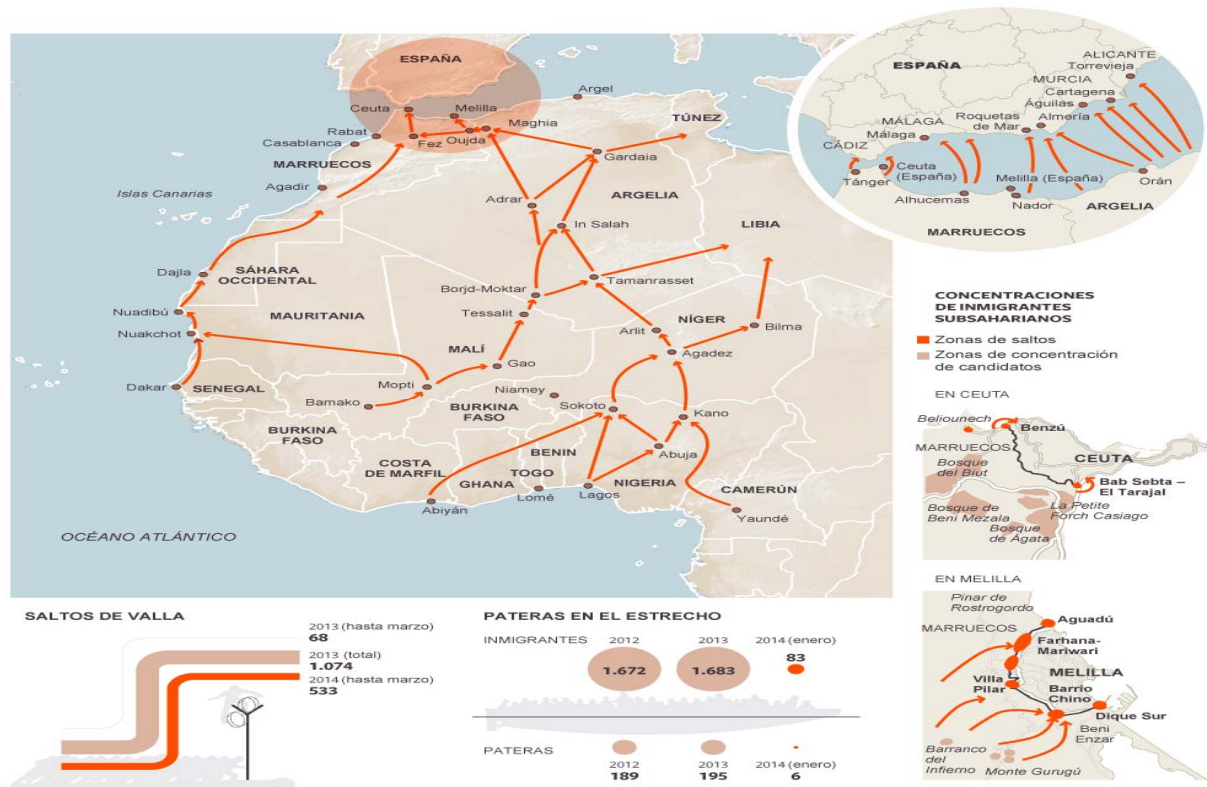
This measure was to prove largely ineffective to bar undesirable migrant access to Spanish territory as Senegalese fishermen, initially seeking fish further north off the coast of Mauritania due to the depletion of their territorial fishing banks, noticed

the proximity of the Spanish Canary Islands and, therefore, the possibility of increasing their earnings by using their fishing boats to transfer migrants to Spain (Garbus, A. 2014). In 2006 alone, 39,180 Sub Saharan African undocumented migrants took this new migration route to reach Europe's southernmost border, in what became known as the "dinghy crisis" (Figueroa, V. 2014).

Although northwardly movement is currently facilitated by the existence of well-travelled migration routes and available information about how to sort out different obstacles along the way, study participants knew that this journey entailed a high degree of risk. However, they were confident that if others in their same situation had made it before them, they might succeed as well, and the ultimate benefit would compensate for any sacrifices made. It was as if life had handed them a card, which they felt the need to play since it offered the only chance to change their and their families' future living conditions for the better.

Quite significantly, they all invoked their faith as a source of encouragement and reassurance throughout their migration journey. They all expressed the strong belief that their life was in God's hands. Mou, one of the more verbal study participants, summed up the group's perspective by stating that *"you either die in the water or you die in your room. After all, it's God's will where you die"*. These assertions are consistent with references found in the available literature on migration that highlight the important role of faith in the decision to migrate and in coping with the struggles associated with transnational migration (Hagan, 2008; Levit, 2007) as cited in Flores-Yeffal (2013).

## 4.2. The journey



Map 2 Overland migration routes to Spain from West Africa. Source: Rodrigo Silva/Antonio Alonso, in El País, 17 March 2014.

### 4.2.1. Launching the trip

Given the diverse itineraries taken by different study participants to reach Europe depending on their point of departure within Africa, this first section will focus attention on the experiences of those study participants that were obliged to follow overland routes prior to reaching the dinghy's launching point off Morocco's Atlantic Ocean coastline.

This journey usually progresses in different stages of various durations depending on a host of factors. As Ama reported, it took him 3 years to reach Spain. A major reason for this staged progression has to do with changes in undocumented migrants' finances during their journey. Reports from different study participants indicate that, although most set out with enough cash to pay transporters all the way

to their intended destinations, they frequently ran into unexpected problems that gradually depleted their savings. On one hand, the fees to be paid to transporters were often higher than expected and then they also had to pay exorbitant fees to border guards and people smugglers, which they could not possibly circumvent. At times, after making an initial payment, some of these intermediaries requested additional sums of money to complete the requested service, which they felt obliged to pay as otherwise they could be left stranded or prevented from moving forward. A few study participants also reported being robbed by roadside bandits.

If they found themselves with no money to continue their journey, they had to remain at intermediate points along their chosen route until they could make additional income. The only solution, unless they could count on a money transfer from family or friends, was to find jobs at these locations. They normally found menial jobs, as, for example, laying bricks, carrying heavy loads, gardening, or cleaning that demanded long working hours in exchange for little income. Their scarce earnings naturally resulted in having to extend their stay over a lengthy period in order to build the necessary savings to fund the next leg of their journey.

They could not possibly refuse these deplorable working conditions as their lack of legal documents prevented them from accessing other types of income-generating opportunities. In order to save up as much as possible, the participants in this study that took overland routes opted to reduce their living expenses by sleeping outdoors and fed themselves with leftovers found in market places. These choices led them to seek shelter in peripheral areas of town, where they began to experience the effects of marginalisation: increased invisibility, poor hygienic conditions, theft, to name a few.

While confronted with these kinds of adversities, study participants could naturally depend on support provided by other undocumented migrants they encountered along the same route. Some travel companions had taken these routes before and, therefore, knew what might be lying ahead. They had valuable information about possible jobs and trusted intermediaries in different locations, which helped to plan their route. Fellow travellers also provided emotional support by way of exchanging experiences, helping each other make calls to family back home to reassure family members that they are well and by simply keeping each other company, which reduced sense of loneliness and nostalgia for what they left behind. During this phase of their journey, they also came to rely more significantly on local solidarity to supply those needs they could not meet any other way.

#### **4.2.2. Experience in Maghreb area countries**

Any difficulties experienced during the early stages of their migration journey were only a foretaste of what was waiting for them upon reaching the Algerian border, where their migration experience began to take on a far more troublesome character. On one hand, they had to cross the Sahara desert to reach Morocco. This circumstance placed them entirely in the hands of transporters that often took advantage of them. A number of participants reported that vehicle drivers stopped at some point in the desert and asked passengers for an additional payment to take a long detour as required to avoid a police checkpoint. If they did not accept to pay the additional cost of fuel, they could be left stranded in middle of sand dunes and forced to walk the rest of the way under the scorching sun. It was also reported that a frequent event in middle of the desert was vehicle breakdown, which obliged passengers to either wait for days before the arrival of spare parts, seeing their food and water provisions dwindle before arrival at destination, or else continue the route by foot. According to study participants, many who choose to continue their desert



crossing by foot do not make it. Although there are no precise statistics on migrant deaths in the desert, it is estimated that more migrants perish in the desert than those that finally reach their intended destinations.

On the other hand, they also had to contend with the fact that Algeria has signed cooperation agreements with Spain to control irregular migration, which means that border guards, unlike in previous intervening countries, were actively seeking to arrest and deport undocumented migrants from Sub Saharan Africa. For this reason, those study participants that took overland routes had to start keeping a low profile during the day and move mostly at night. They often lost contact with their group of travel companions and preferred not to communicate much with anybody. Deportation, however, was not their only concern; they were also aware of reports about brutal treatment, often requiring medical attention, experienced by many Sub Saharan undocumented migrants at the hands of Algerian border guards while in detention waiting to be deported or during transfer back to the same border they had left behind. It was well known that they could be abandoned in the middle of nowhere after traveling a great distance in the back of lorries, with no food or water.

Although study participants traveling this route eventually managed to reach the Moroccan border, they could only expect more of the same kind of treatment in Morocco, since this country has also signed cooperation agreements with Spain to control irregular migration. If arrested by Moroccan police, they could be deported back to the Algerian border where they would have to make a new attempt to reach their intended destination while attempting to avoid Algerian border surveillance or else give up and return home. Stories in the media of migrants highlight their persistence despite multiple deportation experiences. Although no study participant

reported having endured an experience of deportation, this may have been because their journey-related stories were generally fragmented.

#### **4.2.3. Maritime crossing**

All participants in this study regardless of point of departure in Africa had to engage in sometimes lengthy negotiations with boat owners to secure a place on the dinghy at an affordable price. The price of passage usually oscillated between \$400 and \$800 according to consulted study participants from this region. In exchange for their payment, the dinghy's owner agreed to supply the fuel, water, and food provisions required for the anticipated duration of the journey, usually between five to nine days depending on their departure point. Nevertheless, even after reaching an agreement, final departure was usually delayed for a number of different reasons. Although dinghies normally had a capacity for up to 30 passengers, most boat owners delayed departure until they were able to fill them up as much as possible, for maximum profit. Another factor that could delay their departure was the need to wait for a calm ocean and a favourable weather forecast. Still another common reason for those who selected launching points off the Moroccan coastline was the presence of coastal surveillance units patrolling the area in order to prevent irregular migrant departures by sea.

During these, at times, lengthy waiting periods, those study participants that had travelled overland to Morocco had to go into hiding in order to avoid police detection. While in hiding they had limited access to food provisions and, therefore, went hungry for several days. Several mentioned the fact that, on several occasions, they failed to reach the boat once the final call for departure was given, as they feared being detected by police at the last moment. This meant going back into their rustic hideouts and prolonging their hunger. It is at this point where undocumented migrants usually get rid of any form of identification, as they know that if they are

arrested they can be sent back once authorities are able to determine their nationality.

Some study participants reported that the maritime crossing to the Canary Islands transpired without major complications, although they admitted that even in good weather conditions, this leg of their journey was not exempt of difficulties. What this basically meant was that they were spared the worst that could possibly happen during this leg of their journey. Aside from favourable weather conditions from beginning to end, the dinghy did not run out of fuel before reaching its intended destination. There were no major leaks in the boat and no major fights between passengers, despite the fact that the dinghy was overcrowded. At a given point, and according to what they had already been warned would likely occur, they were scouted by Spanish coastal guards and escorted to a port in the Canary Islands, where they were immediately arrested by Spanish border control officers upon disembarking.

However, others reported running into bad weather while at high sea; strong winds and huge waves caused their dinghy to fill up with heavy ocean water and nearly capsize. During these brusque movements, some passengers were thrust into the water, where they drowned or were never seen again. These study participants suspected that, perhaps, some passengers jumped into the sea intentionally to end their agony. While their boat remained adrift, some passengers suffered skin burning as a result of the mixture of leaking fuel and salt water. They had to fish to survive as their delayed arrival depleted their food and water provisions. Combined with the scorching sun, some passengers became dehydrated. Others reported that their dinghy simply ran out of fuel at a given point, which obliged them to either return to shore to resupply and wait for suitable ocean

conditions all over again, or else wait for the coastal surveillance patrol to come to their rescue.

#### **4.2.4. Final access to mainland Spain**

According to Spain's current immigration law, migrants that attempt to access Spanish territory without mandatory entry visas issued by the Spanish embassy in their country of origin can be arrested by border guards if and when identified and retained in a detention centre for foreigners during a period not exceeding 60 days, pending resolution of their deportation case by a Spanish judge<sup>10</sup>. All undocumented migrants that took part in this study underwent this experience, as by that point, it was highly improbable to reach the Canary Islands without being scouted by Spanish coastal surveillance. Those who had already endured detention experiences prior to arrival in Spain had to, therefore, undergo yet another similar experience all over again. These centres make undocumented migrants feel imprisoned and unsafe, as they often have to share overcrowded cells with migrants waiting for deportation because of crimes they have committed on Spanish territory. Their living conditions are described as deplorable and certainly not conducive to recovery from any extreme life experiences endured so far in their journey.

If individual cases have not been resolved within legal time frames, which often occurs as prosecutors are unable to determine migrants' nationality or simply because there are too many cases to review, the law requires immigration authorities to immediately release undocumented migrants to Spanish territory even without legal authorisation. Due to the heavy volume of undocumented migrant arrivals to the Canary Islands in 2006,<sup>11</sup> and limited possibilities to offer them adequate living conditions in this location, the government of this autonomous

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<sup>10</sup> Royal decree 162/2014 governing Internment Centres for Foreigners in Spain.

<sup>11</sup> 39,180, as already mentioned, although this figure is controversial, Perez Brito, R 2006, *Cifras que no cuadran: La migración en pateras: de Africa a las Islas Canarias*, Rebelion, 11 October.

region of Spain decided it could not absorb them and opted to transfer the large majority to major cities on mainland Spain by air (Suarez, M. 2006). The participants in this study formed part of these air transfers.

### **4.3. Settling in Spain**

#### **4.3.1. Initial challenges**

A major challenge that all study participants were confronted with from the outset was obtaining legal resident permits. They knew they had to regularise their legal status if they wished to achieve their migration objectives. The lack of legal authorisation to reside in country would subject them to deportation at any moment, thus, exposing themselves to the risk of having to return home empty-handed despite their strenuous efforts to reach Europe. However, obtaining legal permits having accessed Spain without mandatory visas turned out to be far more complicated than any of them anticipated.

The participants in this study, like most other undocumented migrants, reported that they hoped to find a local employer that would offer them a legal work contract so that they could present this document in substitution for the prerequisite entry visa with their application for a legal resident permit. However, they soon found out that local employers rarely offer work contracts without evidence of legal status, as they might otherwise face heavy fines. They said no one had warned them about this beforehand. Consequently, they had to resort to pro-bono lawyers representing local trade unions or migrant support associations to support their claims. This track was equally unsuccessful since, as it was possible to witness during the participant observation, all of them received negative replies along with an order of expulsion prompting them to exit the Spanish territory within a forty-day limit. Although they all decided to appeal this decision, the second reply is, more often than not, equally

unfavourable. One last possibility could be to benefit from a government-sponsored migrant regularisation programme as has been implemented on multiple occasions in the past,<sup>12</sup> but nobody benefited from this type of programme during the period of research.

As a result of this unexpected predicament, the participants in this study found themselves in the awkward position of having to extend the period of reliance on mostly temporary menial jobs that demanded long working hours in exchange for low wages and exposed them to continuous health risk. Several highlighted the fact that they had to live very cheaply once they had sent their remittances to family and paid a portion of their migration journey debts, which was not what they had expected prior to arrival. They also said that they were also obliged to constantly move around as these jobs, usually in sectors like the service industry, construction, agriculture, and factory work, could be found in different geographical locations, which prevented them from settling. In attempts to increase their income, some resorted to street selling of counterfeit goods, but this exposed them to increased risk of police arrest. They reported that the need to remain constantly on alert to avoid police detection made them feel like outlaws and, inevitably, narrowed their life space, contrary to their expectations.

While caught in legal status determination procedures, study participants faced further complications. Many undocumented migrants arrive with untreated health conditions. Although they could access Catalonia's public health system, most undocumented migrants are reluctant to reveal their home address upon registration, out of fear that their personal information might be shared with the legal authority intent on deporting them. Most study participants, therefore, left their health

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<sup>12</sup> The Spanish government has undertaken multiple migrant regularisation processes over the past decades: 1986: 38.181; 1991: 128.068; 1996: 24.691; 2000/2001: 146.781 and 61.365 respectively; 2005: 607.797). Ref: Una evaluación del último proceso de regularización de trabajadores extranjeros en España (febrero-mayo de 2005). Un año después *Miroslava Kostova Karaboycheva* Documento de Trabajo (DT) 15/2006 14/8/2006

conditions untreated and said they would only resort to health services on an emergency basis, even though this approach might result in worse health outcomes over the longer term. Concerns around identification also prevented them from opening a bank account, thus, obliging them to carry all their savings with them at all times and risk losing them in case of theft.

#### **4.3.2. Available social support**

Flores-Yeffal (2013) argues that undocumented migrants would find it extremely hard to cope with these adversities were it not for the fact that they can usually rely on an established social network composed primarily of undocumented migrants from their same ethnic communities that are sensitive to their needs (Flores-Yeffal, 2013). As this author explains, these networks come into existence as undocumented migrants naturally tend to group together for necessary protection in absence of alternative supports. The formation of these networks is, actually, quite spontaneous when undocumented migrants meet in the transnational context and find they share the same cultural background, migratory experiences and similar struggles. The participants in this study entered into contact with established social networks that were primarily composed of undocumented migrants through the social contacts that had agreed to welcome them before leaving their home country. Several network members shared the same housing arrangement to reduce living costs and other network members lived nearby.

Flores-Yeffal explains that through available social networks, newly-arrived undocumented migrants are able to problem-solve with regards to a number of different issues. They are mostly in need of accurate and trustworthy information on a range of pressing topics. Since they have an urgent need to obtain legal resident permits, social network contacts provide them with the names of trustworthy pro-bono lawyers that can help them prepare their applications. These contacts also

inform them about ways to circumvent police in the meantime, to avoid arrest. Other types of information that undocumented migrants deem essential at the outset and which network members are able to provide include: employment opportunities and where to send remittances from; places to buy food, clothes and make international calls from at affordable prices; and places of worship where other same-country nationals congregate. Network contacts also provide necessary social accompaniment, cultural orientation, and help with paying initial living expenses until new arrivals generate new income, since they often arrive with scarce funds.

Beyond their need for assistance with these different practicalities, international migrants also have acute emotional needs (Bughra, D. and Becker, M. 2005). Transnational migration naturally provokes an affective vacuum due to separation from family and friends left behind. International migrants may also grieve the loss of familiar cultural and social structures (Eisenbruch, M. 1991) as cited in Bughra and Becker (2005). Inevitably, this emotional instability gives rise to feelings of ambivalence regarding the decision to migrate. Newly-arrived migrants are progressively able to address these conflicted feelings and adjust to their new life situation by, on one hand, maintaining contact with family and friends left behind through phone or internet, and, on the other hand, by forming new affective relationships. Established migrant social networks are the main source for new social contacts for undocumented migrants.

These are some examples of the tangible and more intangible benefits that newly-arrived undocumented migrants can access once they integrate already established migrant social networks that are primarily composed of other undocumented migrants like them. These networks, in short, mobilise collective efficacy that allows members to problem-solve, make informed decisions, and take coordinated actions that result in their increased protection while faced with diverse



threats in an unfamiliar life context (Flores-Yeffal, 2013). Members may also find some degree of emotional support within established networks. Without this vital resource in their lives, undocumented migrants would feel deprived of meaningful support, as their access to public supports is evidently limited because of their lack of legal resident permits.

In order to sustain their links with established social networks, undocumented migrants must fulfil certain basic conditions. They must consistently show respect for reciprocal solidarity in accordance with cultural traditions (Flores-Yeffal, 2013). Basically, this means being willing to pool their available resources in favour of the group's interest just as they did in their families and communities of origin. For the fact that all network members face threat of arrest and deportation, they must also behave in ways that don't place the wider network in jeopardy. These conditions highlight the importance of trust within the networks that undocumented migrants belong to (Flores-Yeffal, 2013).

Trust is so important for undocumented migrants that their social networks usually develop social surveillance mechanisms to monitor members' behaviour as a means of preventing any breach of trust. Flores-Yeffal cites Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993), who refer to this mechanism as *enforceable trust*. Any violation of trust may result in expulsion from the network. Most members remain compliant as they would otherwise face stigmatisation within the group and, eventually, loneliness, if finally rejected.

#### **4.3.3. Impacts of limited social networks on undocumented migrant**

Despite the meaningful social capital that undocumented migrants benefit from through association with their established social networks, their near exclusive dependence on these networks for social support may have some negative

consequences for them. A major concern expressed by different authors, as cited in Flores-Yeffal (2008), is the fact that since they are able to meet most of their basic needs by association with these networks, they feel there is no obligation to learn the local languages, the cultural norms and practices of the reception country, its laws and their rights (Granovetter, 1973; Wasserman and Faust, 1994). Their networks become social niches, protected enclaves, safe havens, or shields, as referred to in related literature, with little if any contact with mainstream society. In this secluded position network members have more difficulties accessing development opportunities that would help them overcome their precarious life situation (Nee and Sanders, 2001). They will, consequently, remain trapped in jobs that exploit them, which can affect their health over the long term.

In terms of undocumented migrants' reliance on network members for emotional support, the fact that they are all undocumented and, therefore, constantly engaged in efforts to ensure their economic survival, raises the question as to the level of emotional support they can receive while confined to these networks. Undocumented migrants do not only need to deal with common emotional reactions linked to major life transitions, as cited earlier, but also with the compounding effect of extreme life exposures endured throughout their migratory journey. These experiences, as reported by some study participants, included attacks by predators, beatings by human smugglers and police, prolonged confinement in detention centres, and a life threatening desert and maritime crossing experience during which they had witnessed the death of travel companions, hunger, thirst, and extreme temperatures. Without an appropriate psychological space to resolve the worst effects of these experiences, undocumented migrants may suffer poor mental health.

A final point that deserves consideration in relation to undocumented migrant social networks is their inherent fragility. As Flores-Yeffal (2013) indicates, the primary function of the social networks that undocumented migrants belong to is to help members find employment. The lack of labour demand, therefore, inevitably results in network fragmentation, as it is unable to fulfil its fundamental role under these conditions. Undocumented migrants that belonged to networks that have collapsed due to lack of jobs need to be absorbed by alternatively available networks. This point is important to note because in a situation of generalised economic crisis and massive job cuts, most migrant social networks will likely implode under this kind of pressure, leaving its members with few social support options.

Participants in this study were confronted with precisely this kind of situation as a result of the 2008 global economic downturn, which affected the migrant segment of Spain's population in particular.<sup>13</sup> Legally-established migrants that were hosting undocumented migrants lost their jobs and were, therefore, obliged to give up their properties as they were unable to continue making rental or mortgage payments as agreed. While in some cases they were able to maintain their properties, they were no longer able to host undocumented migrants that, after losing their jobs and not being able to find new jobs in a shrunken economy, were not able to contribute their part towards household expenses. Consequent to the loosening of these essential ties, study participants were stranded in a foreign country that was caught up in a major social crisis. They were forced to take shelter on the street and eventually find their way to available emergency accommodation for homeless migrants.

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<sup>13</sup> The rate of unemployment among legally established migrants in 2010 rose to 30%, as compared to 17% within the autochthonous population. *Inmigración y desempleo en España: impacto de la crisis económica*. Eva Madina, Ainhoa Errarte, José Vicens, in: *RETOS ECONOMICOS DERIVADOS DE LA INMIGRACION ECONOMICA EN ESPAÑA* Mayo-Junio 2010 No 854 ICE

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

Although study participants managed to reach Europe and eventually found jobs that allowed them to send remittances to their families, they all expressed a sense that the results of international migration were largely unsatisfactory. Since improving their economic status was a major motivation underlying their decision to migrate, the fact that they were prevented from increasing their income due to the persistent lack of legal resident permits was a source of continuous frustration. Life continued to be a struggle, as they barely had enough to live on after meeting their financial commitments to family and creditors due to the higher cost of living in Spain. Now, they also had to also worry about health risk while working in unsafe conditions. Furthermore, in a far more stratified society than their own, in which they now belonged to a minority group, they inevitably became acutely aware of the fact that they occupied a low position on the social ladder, which increased their sense of poverty and raised fears of racism, discrimination, and stigmatisation they had never experienced back in home country.

Their persistent difficulty to obtain legal resident permits also forced them to be continually on the lookout to avoid police arrest. Since leaving home country, their life had become a continuous effort to remain invisible to police; this underground existence was becoming tiresome. Under these circumstances, they lived with absolute uncertainty about what their future might hold in store; they could be here one day and somewhere else the next depending on what transpired. Prospects of improvement remained bleak. They all reported coming to a point of asking themselves whether their painstaking efforts were worthwhile. Whatever their accumulated gains were as a result of international migration, they did not seem to compensate for their sacrifices. While some reported that they had come too far to abandon at this stage, and that it would be embarrassing to them and their families

to return home with little to show for their efforts, several reported that they had already informed their families about a desire to return to home country but received the advice to hold on a bit longer.

Since their arrival in context, the participants in this study had been able to benefit from their involvement with available migrant social networks to attenuate the impact of these harsh realities. However, the dissolution of these networks under pressure caused by the 2008 global economic crisis deprived them of this basic protection at a moment when they needed it most to cope with the changes this social crisis brought about. Due to their embeddedness in these social networks and resulting lack of similarly intense social ties with members of the autochthonous population they were left with no other recourse than to reach out for public assistance to cover basic needs of food and shelter, which made them feel reinstitutionalised. To make matters worse for them, it would prove challenging to move beyond public assistance in a situation of generalised social crisis, as the lack of jobs prevented the formation and consolidation of new social networks.

In summary, study participants had endured different types of adversities throughout their migratory experience and managed to cope with them to some degree with the limited social support offered by available social network contacts. The overall outcomes, however, were still less than satisfying as, according to their general perceptions, whatever they had gained through international migration did not compensate for their strenuous efforts. The realisation that this imbalance would likely persist, in absence of any prospects for improvement, was deeply disappointing to them as they had to continue living with risk and uncertainty. Return to home country was not an option, since that would represent a major defeat and bring shame on themselves and their families. Their loss of contact with their established social networks as a result of the 2008 global economic crisis only

aggravated their frustrations, worries, and fears. It left them without the usual filters to know who they could trust and, therefore, safely relate to.

Despite the noted limitations associated with the social networks that undocumented migrants belong to, these networks provide an essential coping mechanism to deal with separation from their culture of origin and the consequences of rejection from the majority culture, in absence of alternative supports. Ruptured social networks in the transnational context, therefore, have serious implications for its members, as it leaves them without trusted references. One of its worse consequences is that it might place them in a life context, like a temporary emergency accommodation, which constrains their ability to rebuild their social networks.

## **Chapter 5 – Life at the emergency accommodation**

The previous findings chapter described study participants' migratory experiences prior to their arrival at the emergency accommodation with particular attention to those factors that could weaken their capacity to socially connect. This second findings chapter starts by describing the structural drivers of risk for social connection that study participants encountered during the period of this study, after establishing residence at the emergency accommodation where this research took place. Against this backdrop, the chapter proceeds by identifying the available social resources in study participants' surroundings that could, potentially, facilitate social connection and reflects upon their use of these resources, in order to reveal the individually-based social assets that some study participants mobilised to establish and maintain these links.

### **5.1. Structural drivers of risk for social connection**

As became clear through study participants' descriptions of their transnational journey experiences, they had not had an easy life since their departure from home country. At least Ama and Daw, had taken several years to reach Europe. All study participants reported that they were regularly exposed to different kinds of dangers along the way, some of which were life-threatening. They had lived through extremely unpleasant life situations, such as exploitation, hunger, thirst, theft, exposure to climate extremes, to mention only a few. Most reported that they had arrived in Spain in 2006, the year in which undocumented migrant arrivals from Sub Saharan Africa to Spain's Canary Islands peaked. After overcoming multiple obstacles, they expected that their final arrival in Europe would be the start of a new life. However, they were soon disenchanted, as they continued to confront numerous adversities as a result of their lack of legal resident permits. While

confronted with these life adversities, study participants conveyed a sense that there was no turning back once they had reached their destination country, as their families expected them to send regular remittances as agreed before departure. It, otherwise, did not make sense to resign from their plans given all the sacrifices made so far to reach Europe. They all acknowledged that social contacts within their ethnic communities that welcomed them upon arrival were vital to maintain their course. Were it not for this support, they likely would have been stranded. Their available social contacts at arrival points were vital to find adequate housing, information about jobs that could be accessed by undocumented migrants and for support during periods of unemployment between jobs. They had, consequently, never moved too far away from their established social networks.

#### **5.1.1. Consequences of job market decline during economic recession**

All study participants, except for the younger ones that had been transferred from a centre for minors upon turning 18 years old, lost their jobs due to the 2008 global economic crisis and remained unemployed throughout the period of this study. Abu and Sau's case was representative of what had occurred to other study participants. As usually occurs during periods of economic recession, their unskilled and low paid jobs were filled by locals or legally-established migrants, which left them with fewer job options. The persistent difficulty to find new jobs that would accept undocumented migrants in this economically-depressed context eventually led to the depletion of whatever savings they had accumulated. Unable to continue contributing financially towards household expenses, according to flat-sharing agreements, they had to finally abandon their living arrangements with network members. No one they knew could help out in this situation, since all their social contacts were in a similar situation as their own.



After becoming homeless, all study participants reported that they lost contact with their available social networks since network members scattered in different directions in search of alternative housing arrangements. Since most migrant social networks had disbanded for similar reasons, there were none available to absorb them and provide alternative accommodation options. Faced with this reality, Abu and Sau admitted that they had to make their home on the streets, sleeping in parks, cash withdrawal booths or abandoned vehicles, and eating in soup kitchens until they found this emergency accommodation. The sense was that the rest had experienced similar situations although they were reluctant to speak openly about this.

Destitution, as a result of persistent unemployment had eventually caused them to move away from their available social networks and, therefore, lose crucial informal social support provided by these networks just when they appeared to have greater need for them to deal with the dire consequences of the economic recession. In this adverse situation, they faced a number of unexpected pressures that could, potentially, negatively impact on their ability to maintain interpersonal relationships and reconstitute their social networks. The factors relating to this are examined in the following sub sections.

#### **5.2.1. Family pressures**

As emerged during a weekly support group discussion, what study participants were most concerned about after becoming destitute was the fact they could not continue sending regular remittances to their families according to agreed plans. Discontinuation of remittances could bring shame on their families as, in some cases, their parents or relatives would have to confront creditors they had borrowed from to fund their migration journey and if they did not receive remittances, they

would be obliged to sell more personal property or rely on other community members to pay their loan instalments, both which would be quite embarrassing. It would signal that their relative living abroad was not doing so well, contrary to what they may have previously reported.

Another related concern reported by study participants was that since family members back home held the notion that there were plenty of job opportunities in Europe, they would simply not believe them if they informed their families that they had become unemployed and were unable to find new jobs. For this reason, several study participants reported that they stopped calling their family members as they used to, as they would find it hard to justify their current economic status. And yet, the lack of communication with family, combined with the fact that they were not able to resume remittances, also made them worry about the possibility that their families might conclude that they were keeping all their earnings to themselves. They did not want to be perceived as disloyal towards their families, as this would cause them to be shamed by their own families. These multiple economic concerns motivated them to focus most of their attention on finding income generating opportunities and consider anything else, including social relationships, a secondary matter.

As Usa argued:

*“We’re continually thinking about financial need and can’t take time to hang out with other people”.*

### **5.2.2. Concerns about respect**

Another related concern expressed by different study participants in the course of casual encounters and in weekly support group meetings is that they would be

embarrassing themselves if they sought new friendships at a moment when they had no money and were living in an emergency accommodation. People would simply not respect them once they found out about their impoverished state. Although they could try to hide this aspect from others or even lie about their real condition, they did not like to be put in that position. Their economic difficulties would likely become evident anyway as they would be consistently unable to spend money on consumptions during social outings. They did not want others to feel obliged to pay for them all the time. I suggested that an alternative option might be to simply not engage in any consumption during social outings, but most agreed that to do so would cause them to feel left out, unable to enjoy themselves as much as others were. In these conditions, they expressed preference for casual meetings with flatmates at the end of the day during which there was no obligation to spend.

Rather than seek to increase their level of social contact in their dire economic condition, many fell back on the idea that they had not migrated to Europe to improve their social life. As Usa argued in a weekly support group meeting,

*“We’re only here for some time to make money and then return home, we’re not here to engage in side activities.”*

### **5.2.3. Breakdown of solidarity mechanism**

Since group members felt constrained about engaging in social contact because of their current economic difficulties, I wondered whether these same difficulties could also have a negative impact on their relationships with nearby others. The overall sense provided by study participants was that to engage with people that were in similar condition as their own also entailed risk that they would be asked to provide financial support at a moment when they barely had enough to cover their own individual needs. As Ama said, summing up the group’s position:

*“I have enough problems of my own to deal with other people’s problems”.*

At further analysis, several study participants expressed that they did not like refusing support to others, but because they had no choice at this point, they did not feel at ease asking others for support, which inevitably resulted in keeping certain distances amongst each other. For this reason, several expressed a stronger preference for contacts with individuals that could help them overcome their destitute condition. Perhaps, this preference explains why certain study participants were observed relying mostly on staff members to address their concerns.

#### **5.2.4. Induced passivity**

Throughout field observations, it also became apparent that the lack of economic prospects and consequent dependence on public supports was fostering greater passivity among some study participants, especially the younger ones. The younger participants in this study had been transferred from State-run institutions for minors upon turning 18 years of age, where their various needs were entirely covered. They were, therefore, not used to functioning more autonomously in this context. After arriving at the emergency accommodation, they expected the same level of treatment. Since support provided at this accommodation was limited to room and board, they became idle while waiting for seasonal jobs in the agricultural sector. Rather than seek alternative solutions, they more often complained about the insufficient support provided in this new life setting, drawing negative comparisons with their previous living arrangements.

This passivity was also reflected in weekly administrator-resident meetings when they had an opportunity to voice their particular concerns and engage with others in a problem-solving dynamic. Most opted to remain quiet and allow administrators to

discuss the problems they had perceived at “floor level” throughout the previous week. A typical meeting agenda listed the following topics:

- New resident arrival
- The rug to pray on
- The washing machine/ white and coloured clothes
- Talk about the kitchen and cleaning shifts
- General cleaning on Thursdays
- Reminder about turns to pick up bread
- Reminder of different chores : Put out the trash, clean the kitchen, wash the garbage cans, sign up for lunch/supper
- Sharing the rooms (there are complaints that some items are missing)
- No sleeping on the sofas
- If someone has something to say, say it.

And most residents remained silent.

#### **5.2.5. Lack of intermediaries within ethnic communities**

A major consequence for study participants of loss of social contacts within their established social networks was the fact that it deprived them of trusted intermediaries to facilitate new social connections. Decisions to relate to different people were traditionally based on the network’s judgement and not on their individual assessment. Without this type of filter, many admitted that establishing social relationships had become a challenge for them. This was especially important in the social setting they were caught in, where they felt that they had to be extremely cautious about whom they related to.

#### **Summary**

Destitution, therefore, seemed to be a major complicating factor in study participants' inclination to rebuild their social networks during the period of this research, and for several different reasons. On one hand, since all were struggling financially, they felt unable to engage in relationships of reciprocal solidarity as were characteristic in their culture of origin. To engage in social contact at this time could also feel far too threatening if they anticipated that others might not show adequate respect upon learning about their impoverished condition. On the other hand, they were beset by strong family pressures that led them to block out any other consideration than economic gain. Although most were not opposed to forming new social relationships, they prioritised relationships that might help them progress economically and disregarded other relationship opportunities.

Prolonged destitution could also induce a stronger sense of helplessness among some study participants, resulting in greater passivity and overdependence on public assistance structures to get by. Individuals who feel unable to exercise self-agency over a prolonged period may experience decreased self-esteem and self-confidence and start blaming themselves or others for their difficulties to progress. With considerable doubts that they'll ever meet their life expectations, they may begin to question the validity of their sacrifices, as several did, expressing the desire to return home even empty-handed. Resulting feelings of inadequacy can then also make them anticipate social rejection, causing them to socially withdraw.

### **5.1. Lack of local contacts**

Except for a few study participants that stated that they had Spanish girlfriends, the majority of study participants reported that they did not have a single friend among the local population. Most study participants justified their lack of contacts within the autochthonous population by the fact that they had to spend most of their

time working or else actively seeking new jobs if they lacked one, which left little time for socialising. Other arguments given included feeling exhausted by the end of the day and, therefore, not in the right mood to be around others, and lack of spending money after covering the cost of remittances and household expenses. In these conditions, they felt more comfortable with limiting their social life to the small number of migrants with whom they shared a flat, as this allowed them to avoid spending. They also pointed out that they had to be watchful about whom they related to within the wider population out of fear of arrest and deportation.

Several study participants argued that they would not think of starting to establish social relationships with local people, since they had too many burdens to deal with at this point in their lives. Despite the fact that they were reminded that they could approach the researcher for individual counselling to address their more acute difficulties, which might gradually permit greater investment in social relationships, only a few contacted the researcher for this purpose throughout the fieldwork. Some study participants approached me on a casual basis to discuss rather intimate subjects related to their romantic life, as I was leaving the emergency accommodation at the end of the day. Data related to these individual encounters is not included in this analysis since it was difficult to reach any firm conclusions as to its contribution towards clarifying the questions this research sought to answer.

### **5.1.2. Re-institutionalisation**

Study participants made some references to their feelings about residing in an emergency accommodation that suggested that this type of setting also influenced their personal disposition to socially connect. Although they all felt some relief over the fact that they were able to avoid life on the streets, the simple fact of finding themselves trapped in an overcrowded living space, bunched together with people

they were barely familiar with beforehand and with little if any sense of privacy, felt overbearing for them. It was a depressing reminder of previous experiences during which they were bunched together with total strangers that were all struggling with similar situational circumstances, like migrant detention centres they had gone through during their journey from home country.

What was made clear to them upon initial arrival at the emergency accommodation is that they would have to adjust their life to a series of norms and institutional procedures. New applicants for a bed had to first undergo an admission interview to determine the appropriateness of offering them placement. This procedure required opening a case file and responding to a battery of questions. They were then informed of specific rules that if broken would imply automatic expulsion from the flat, like violent behaviour and bringing in drugs or weapons. They were also informed about a set of rules that if not respected would earn them a fault; after accumulating three faults they could also be expelled. Before concluding this admission interview, they had to contract to follow house rules.

If admitted at the end of this procedure, they were then shown to their assigned room, which they had to accept if there were no other options available. If they did, an ID card showing their new address was made and issued to them. After this, they were informed about the daily timetable for different activities at the flat, like meal times and house meetings. They were also given a house chore to carry out on a weekly basis. Of all these routine activities, the only one that did not require their timely participation was daily meals, which they could take or leave according to their wishes. Within these set limits, they were free to move in and out of the flat at will until door closure time at 11 pm.



Several study participants reported that after spending some time in this highly structured and monitored environment they could not help feeling institutionalised. The existence of what they considered to be too many rules regulating life in the flat, which were strictly enforced by the association's staff, reminded them that they had little control over their situation. They felt that being constantly monitored while in the flat by staff and occasionally reprimanded for breaking a rule was quite infantilising at their age. When considering these combined features, the emergency accommodation did not appear to be a place that was conducive to substantial social interaction, but, rather a temporary holding point in absence of alternative accommodation arrangements.

### **5.1.3. Temporariness of living arrangements**

According to emergency accommodation rules residents could only stay a maximum of three months. If residents had not found an alternative living arrangement by the end of this period, they had the option of being transferred to a different emergency accommodation within the city of Barcelona, where, once again, they would be admitted on a 3-month basis. Therefore, from the outset, all residents lived with the understanding that their current living arrangements were strictly temporary. In conversations held during weekly support group meetings and casual encounters with different study participants, several expressed the fact that they dreaded the prospect of having to move to a different emergency accommodation at the end of their stay, which would likely be larger and more impersonal and not exclusively intended for international migrants like them. They did not like to have to share their living space with random others they were not previously acquainted with.

This concern was another cited reason to justify their undivided attention on finding new jobs, as to become employed would grant them the possibility of entering into new flat-sharing arrangements with other migrants and, therefore, avoid future transfers to area emergency accommodations. They otherwise felt that engaging in meaningful social contact was pointless since they could be here one day and gone the next, never to be seen again.

## **5.2. Climate of distrust**

During this acute stage of the ongoing economic recession, and as reported in various newspaper articles and TV debates on the topic of immigrants in Spain, it became perceptible that Spain's government had scaled up its efforts to curtail new undocumented migrant arrivals from the African region. One measure was to encourage already settled undocumented migrants to leave, with the expectation that new migrant candidates would learn about these developments through their established networks and desist in their efforts to reach Spain without entry visas. Towards this aim, the Spanish government increased police surveillance on migrants to make sure they carried a legal resident permit. If they were stopped and were unable to show legal authorisation to remain, or proof of application for legal resident permits, they were fined. While the Spanish immigration law stipulates that migrants can be, indeed, fined in these cases, the application of fines was actually quite uncommon until this point.

Another development intended to increase the rate of undocumented migrant departures was the more frequent application of the deportation clause by immigration authorities. According to the cited immigration law, deportation of undocumented migrants is normally reserved for extreme situations when international migrants have been arrested due to involvement in criminal behaviour. A large majority of undocumented migrants from different nationalities that were now

being deported did not have a criminal record. They had only been arrested and kept in detention for lacking legal resident permits while a Spanish judge decided their fate.

In this climate of increased suspicion with regards to members of certain migrant groups, study participants had more reason to fear arrest and deportation, which would signify the failure of their migration project. Although they could make new attempts to migrate transnationally, as, in fact, many undocumented migrants that have been deported often do, deportation is usually what undocumented migrants dread most. If returned to country of origin, undocumented migrants would have nothing to show their families for their efforts, which would bring shame on them. In fact, it would bring shame on the entire family, since it would demonstrate that the family's investment in the migration project ultimately came to nothing. For this reason, and well aware of the fact that the police was carrying out massive raids to arrest undocumented migrants almost on a daily basis, many study participants felt strongly inclined to keep the lowest social profile possible during this period.

Alongside increased pressure exerted by police to limit undocumented migrant visibility during this difficult economic period, representatives from extreme nationalist parties take advantage of these situations to boost their constituencies by placing the blame for all of the country's problems on international migrants. They typically associate international migrants with increased crime and overuse of public services. Sensitive to the possibility that voters might feel drawn to these radicalised discourses during a difficult economic period, mainstream conservative parties typically react by adopting similar discourses. Consequently, migrants, and especially those which society readily associates with the phenomenon of irregular migration, like African migrants, have to contend with an increasingly hostile environment.

At a weekly support group meeting during which the discussion revolved around their perceptions regarding local attitudes towards them, it became clear that all study participants concurred that Catalans and Spaniards were basically racist. Ade exemplified shared views in this group by stating that Spaniards were afraid of Africans because of the colour of their skin, and concluded that this unintelligent reaction only revealed their jealousy towards Africans. According to study participants' perceptions, racist attitudes had intensified during this difficult economic period. They suspected that increased hostility had to do with more frequent media-based messages associating undocumented migrants with mafias and their illegal activities.

For these reasons, study participants expressed concern that if they exposed themselves too much at this time, locals might report them to police so as to facilitate their deportation. Evidence of these concerns was also reflected in their apparent suspiciousness with regards to outsiders coming to the emergency accommodation, as any unfamiliar person could be linked with immigration authorities intent on deporting them. Their suspiciousness was evidenced during initial weekly support group meetings when certain group participants made discreet signals to other participants to withhold their comments on certain topics. Their remarks might reveal more information than some considered appropriate and jeopardise the entire group's safety.

Prolonged exposure to a general climate of distrust and suspicion could, potentially, provoke a strong reluctance in some study participants to engage in substantial social contact during this period. Perhaps, for this reason, some preferred to stay at the flat after lunch and for the rest of the day, napping, watching TV, listening to music in their room, or using the provided laptop computer. The noted decline in participation in weekend outings by a portion of the group could

also be related to some members' concerns about making themselves more clearly visible while moving around in a large group, as this would expose them to increased public scrutiny.

## **5.2. Group dynamics**

As observed at the outset of the participant observation, the group of residents was divided into different subgroups along ethnic lines, and resident-to-resident social interactions mainly occurred within these ethnic subgroups. This general relational pattern was evidenced during mealtimes and in their comings and goings, when members of certain ethnic subgroups were seen mostly mixing amongst each other. A few helped each other out with their house chores. At weekly administrator-resident meetings they sat together in one area and communicated almost entirely with the administrators, if at all. Scarce communication among residents across ethnic lines generally occurred around use of common resources, like the TV and then the mini-laptop.

At one of the weekly support group meetings, I shared my perception with residents that they were not taking real advantage of available opportunities to communicate with each other more substantially. They were not even addressing each other directly in the context of group meetings. Most interactions occurring within the group setting were limited to group member-facilitator exchanges. Mou immediately reacted to this observation by sharing his impression that the lack of direct communication among group members was basically due to lack of trust in one another. This comment set off a rather intense reaction from remaining group members present at this session, each of them trying to get their particular view heard at the same time and, therefore, making it quite difficult to sort out what each

was trying to convey. Apparently, the topic of trust had hit a raw nerve among group participants.

Group members' responses indicated a high level of polarisation around this particular topic. On one hand, there were a number of group participants that expressed a degree of hesitation about trusting others; it wasn't something that could happen naturally. Their expressed preference was to approach others cautiously. According to the way they saw it, it was important to be able to trust others completely, and, if not possible, it was best to not trust at all.

Sai summed up his position by stating: *"if you can't trust anyone entirely, it's not worth trying to establish any degree of trust."*

Mah added to this generalisation by stating: *"If I can't even trust my mother entirely, how am I going to trust someone else? It's better to only place one's trust in God."*

Lai summarised these points by stating: *"it's better not to stick your neck out too much."*

Sai further pointed out that his trust had been broken before, but did not wish to expand on this point. Others concurred and without providing further details, provided a sense that they had felt betrayed by fellow migrants they had encountered along the way since leaving home country. This impression was reinforced by additional statements made by different group members, like:

*"Others can easily let you down, or even betray you"*

*"Everyone wants to get ahead in life"*

*"People can get to know you and then use that information against you"*

Some residents even hinted that their transfer to the emergency accommodation was a consequence of their peer contacts letting them down, which was deeply disappointing to them. They also expressed some concerns about being taken advantage of by others in their vulnerable condition, well aware of the fact that everyone was equally desperate in financial terms.

On the other hand, several other group members seemed to have a more flexible view on the issue of trust. Jai for example, stated that:

*“No one is perfect, and, therefore, deserving of absolute trust, but some level of trust is necessary to get on in life.”*

From Abu’s perspective, what was important was to recognise that different people deserve a different degree of trust. These and other group members were willing to concede that the only way of knowing whether a person they were not previously familiar with was trustworthy was by opening oneself up to the possibility of establishing a trusting relationship and then seeing what happened. As Sof said,

*“One has to at least try to establish a trusting relationship with others and see what happens.”*

Other group members retorted that it simply wasn’t worth taking that risk; Lai stated:

*“You can get hurt in the process”.*

All, though, appeared to share a similar perception that everyone was primarily looking out for his own interest, to get ahead in life.

It seemed by the end of this discussion that there was much more to say about the trust issue, which could reveal some of their difficulties to establish social connection, since trust is central in social relationships. However, it seemed like

after sharing their views on this particular topic during the initial discussion, a portion of study participants felt less inclined to continue this discussion. I personally felt this attitude could derive from a feeling that the initial exchange of points of view had been rather intense and, perhaps, too revealing. Perhaps, some study participants had reached the conclusion that it was best not to raise expectations that they would continue to engage in substantial self-disclosure.

In light of their apparent resistance to broaden the discussion on this sensitive topic within a group discussion format, an alternative way to approach this topic could be to ask study participants if they would be willing to individually fill out an existing measure of trust, which would then allow us to comment on the results obtained. The Propensity to Trust Survey (PTS) developed by Evans, A. (2007) was selected as an appropriate measure to explore this topic in greater depth. All but one resident, for a total of thirteen participants, accepted to take part in this research activity. The following sub section explores some of the major themes regarding trust arising from study participants' answers to this survey.

### 5.2.1. Results of Propensity to Trust Scale

Figure 3

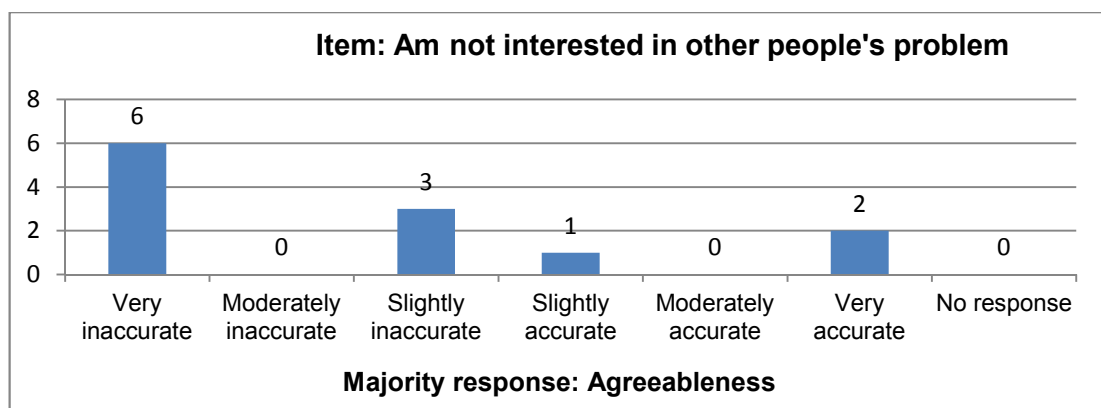




Figure 4

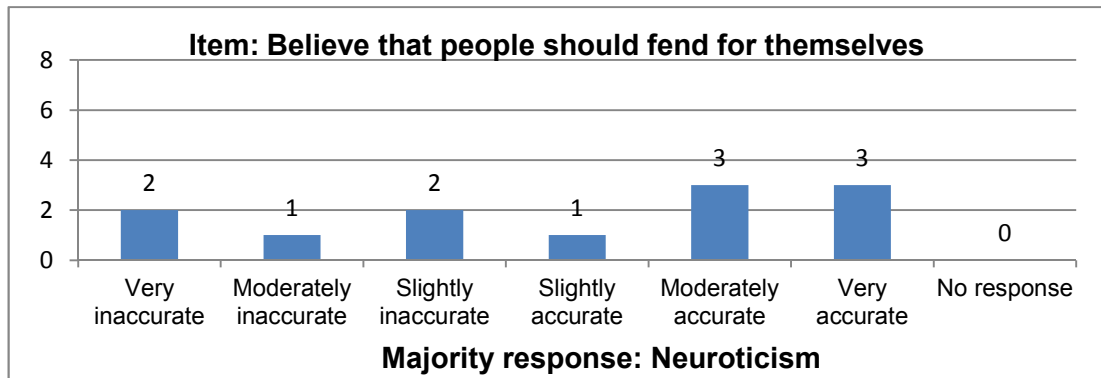


Figure 5

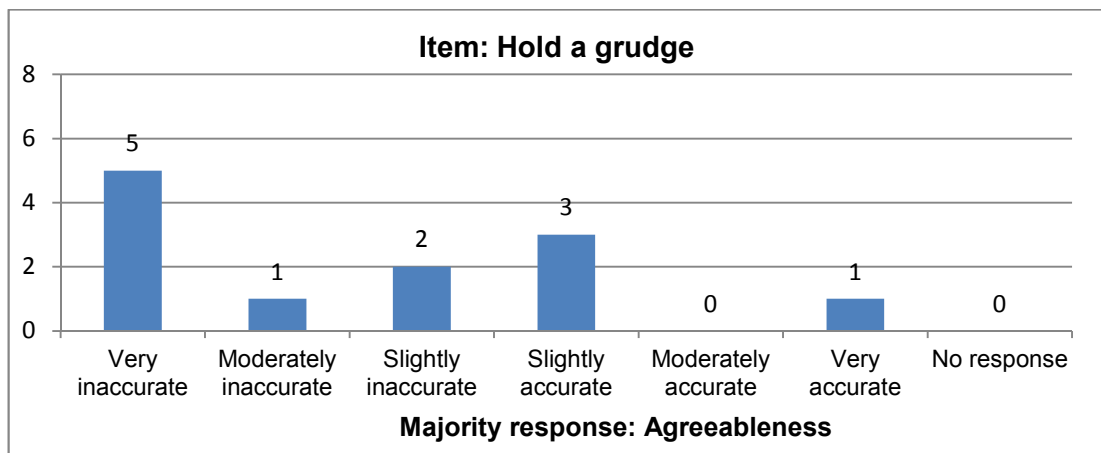


Figure 6

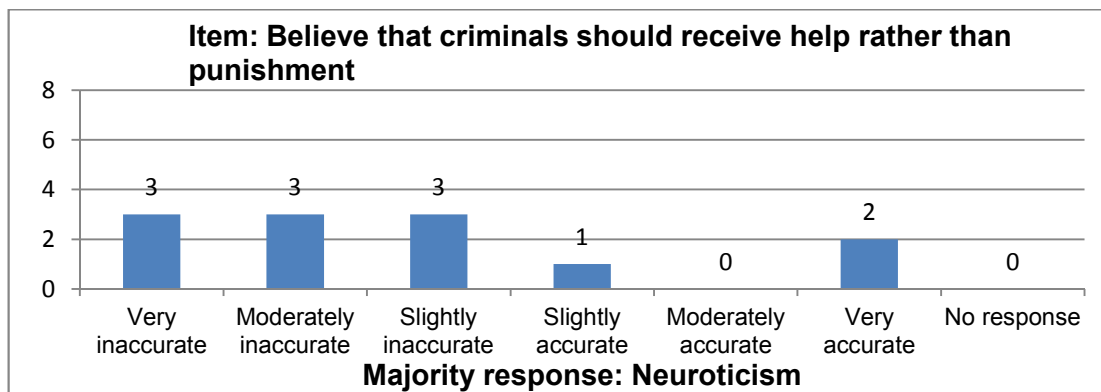


Figure 7



Figure 8

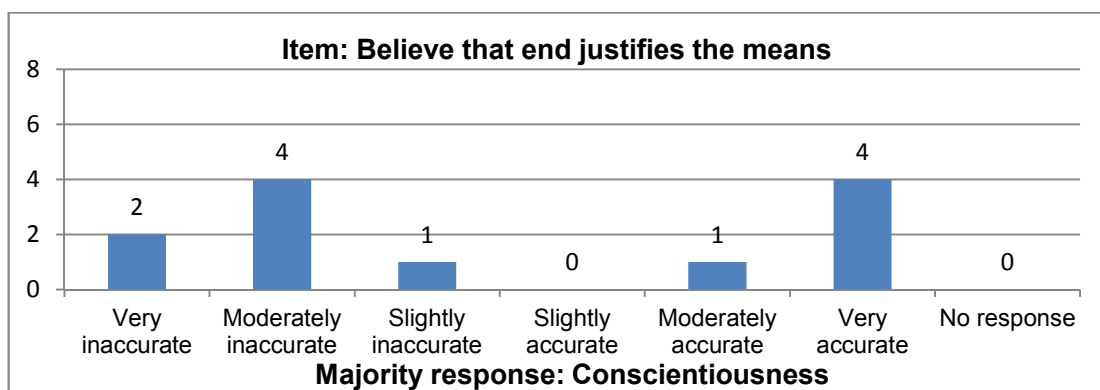


Figure 9

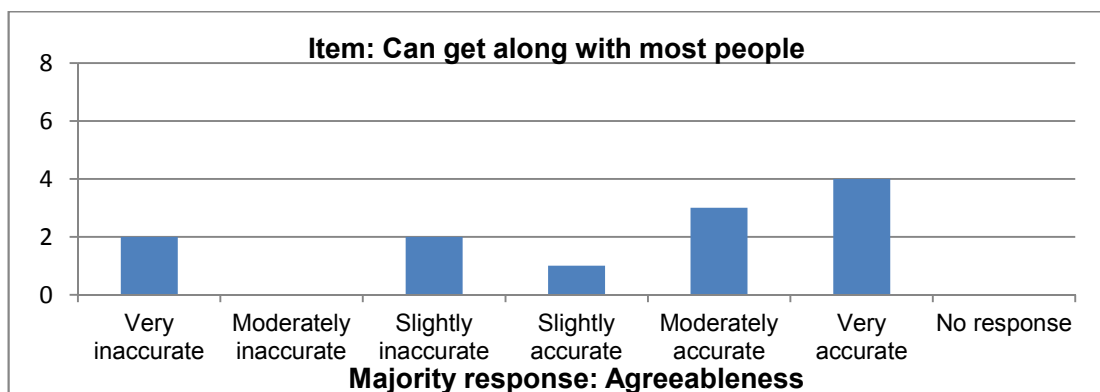


Figure 10

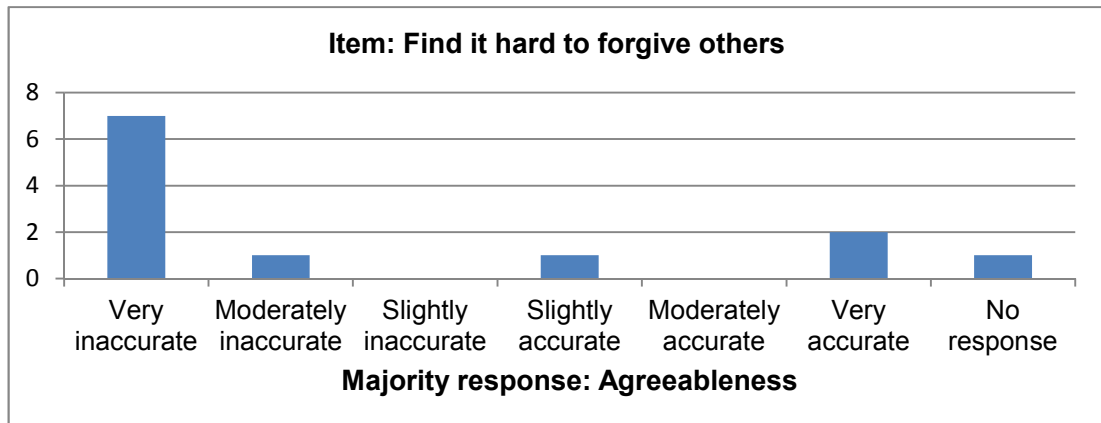


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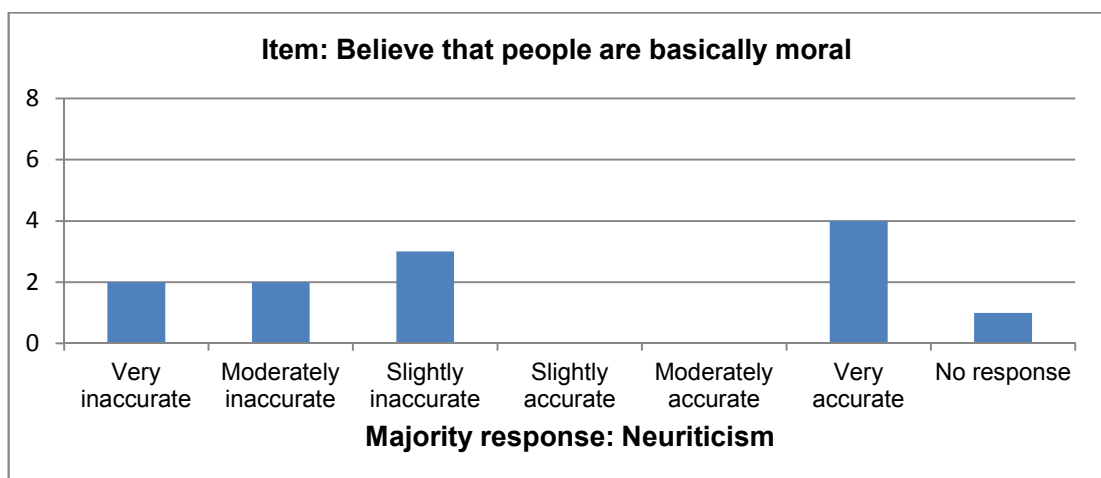


Figure 12

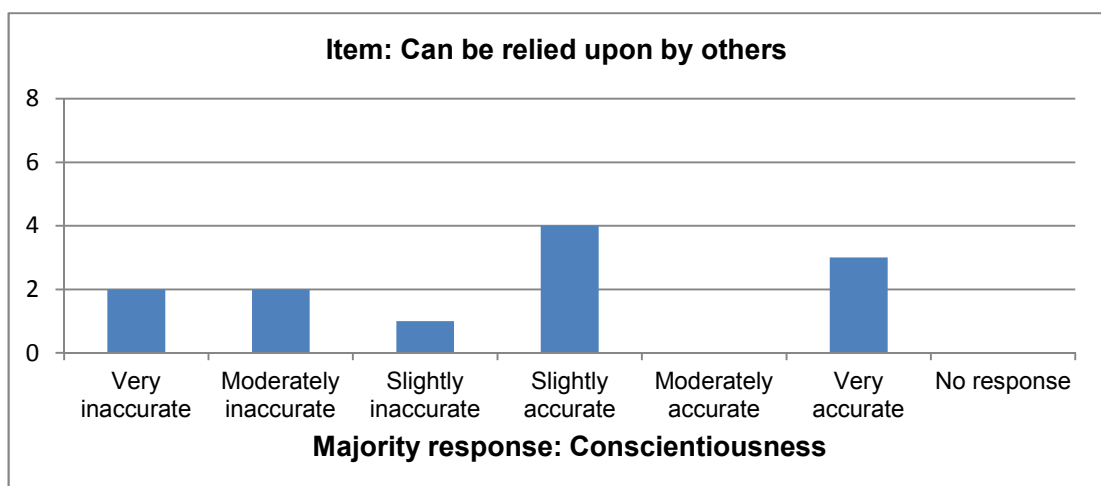


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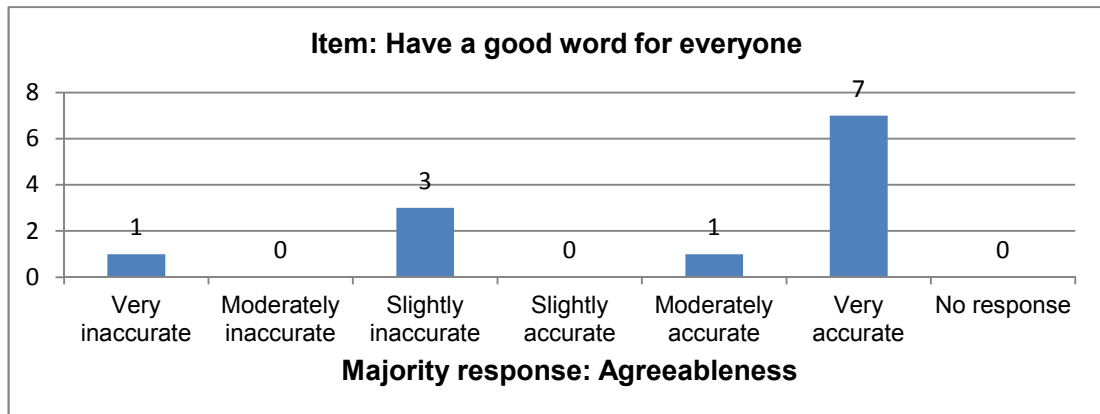


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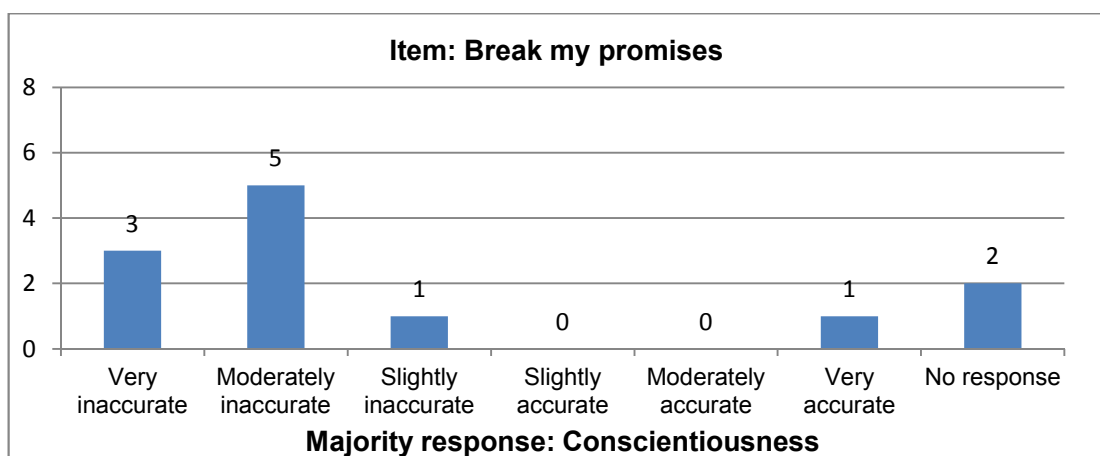


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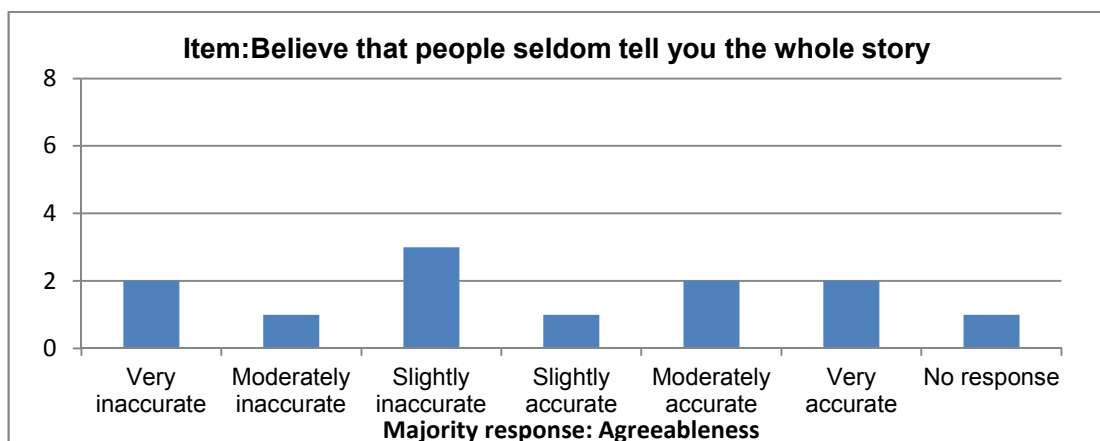


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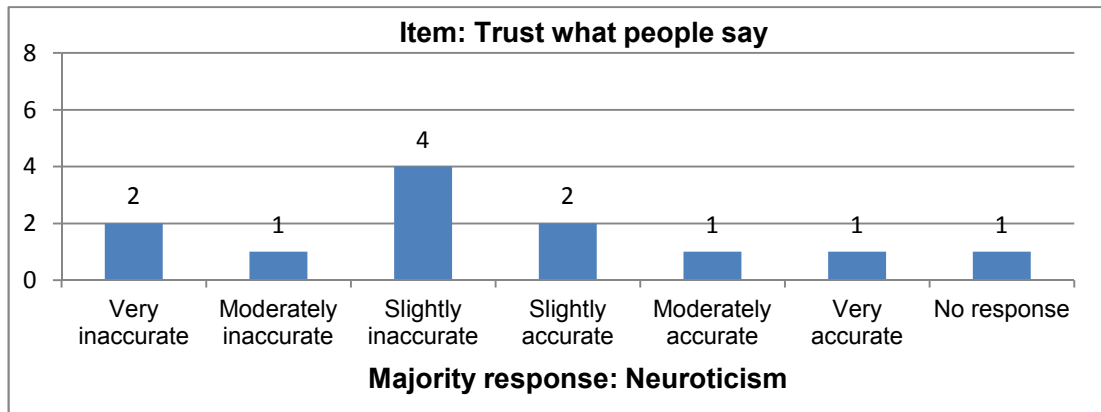


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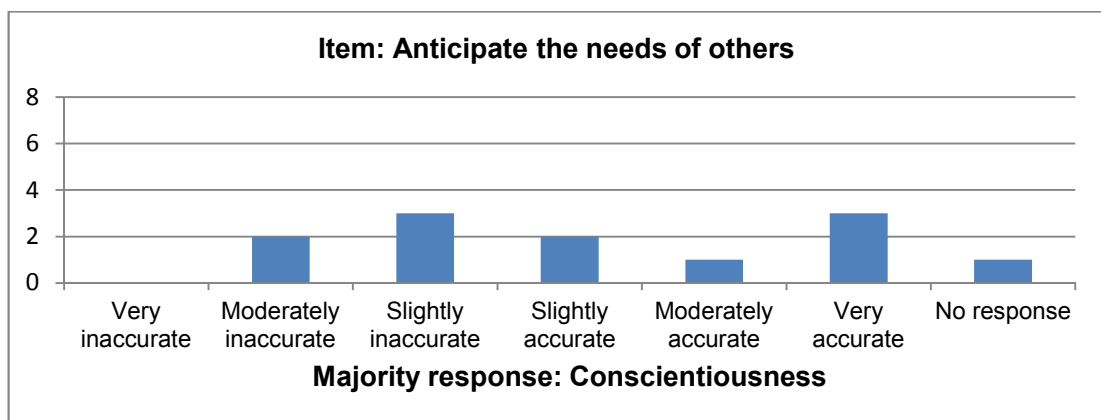


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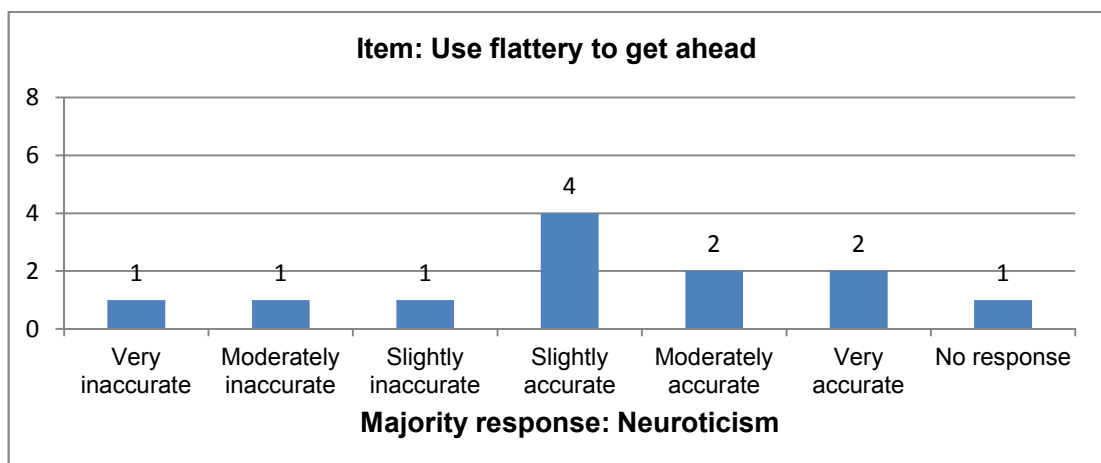


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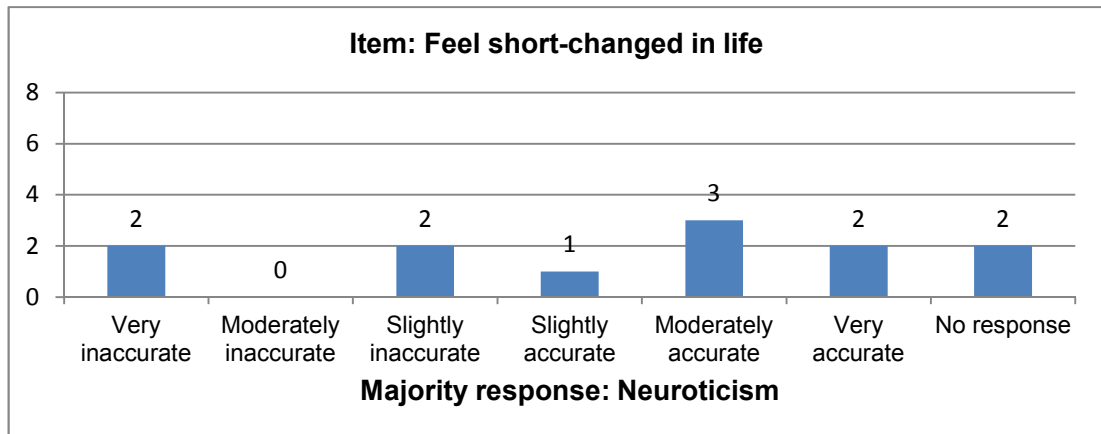


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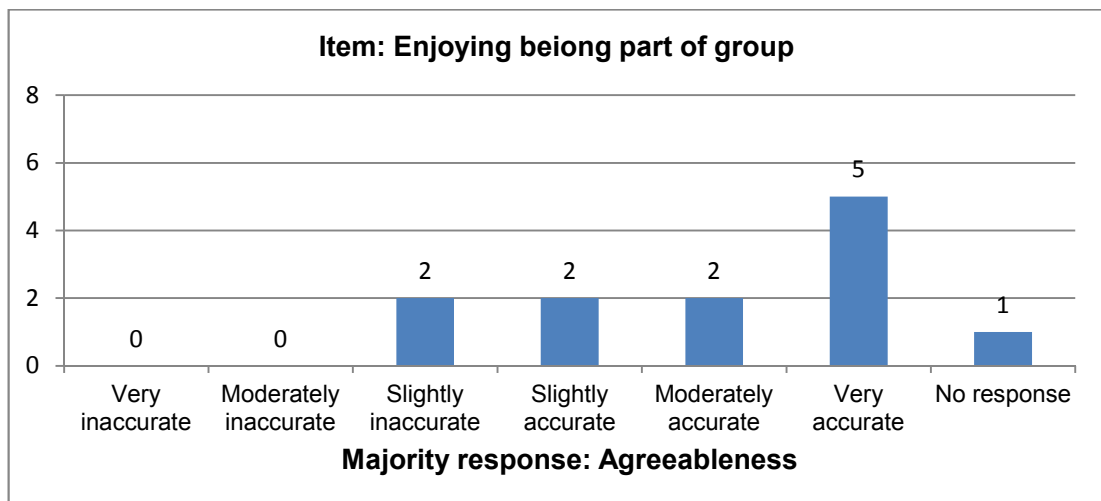


Figure 21

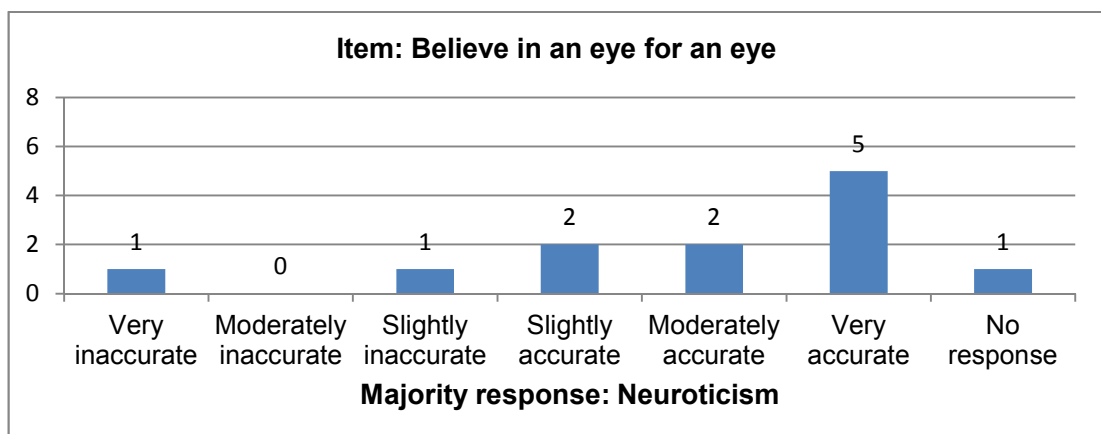


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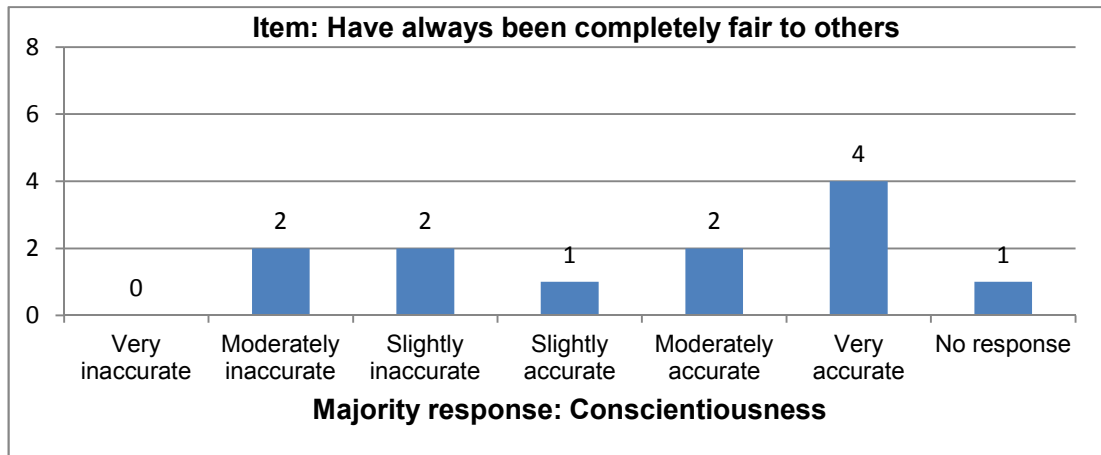


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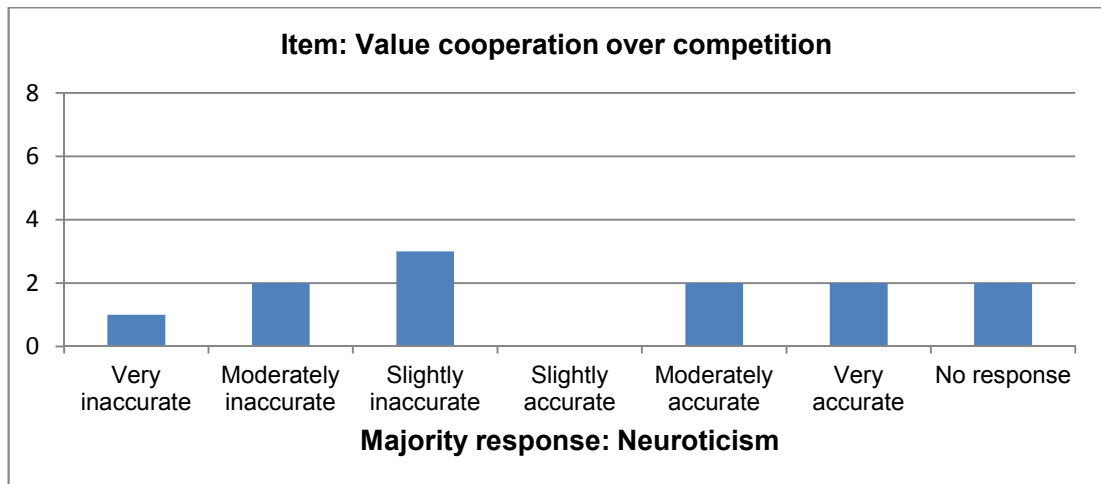


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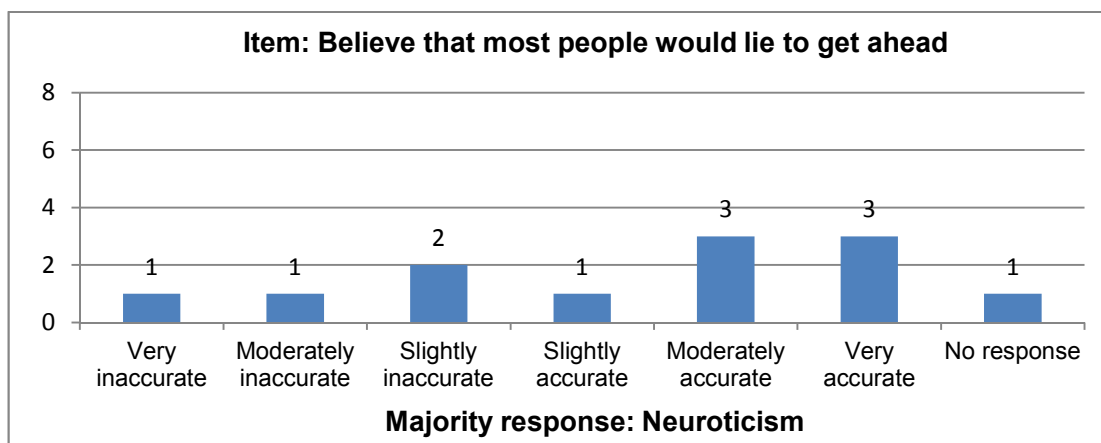


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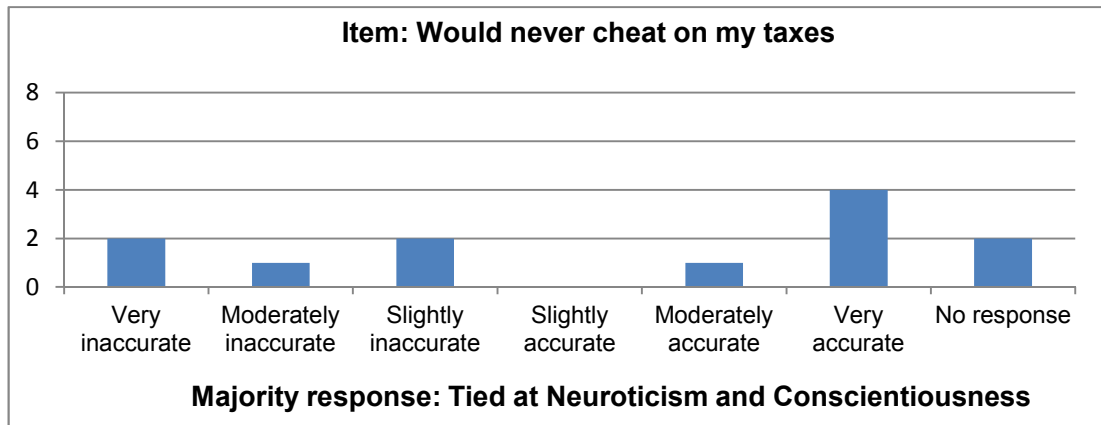


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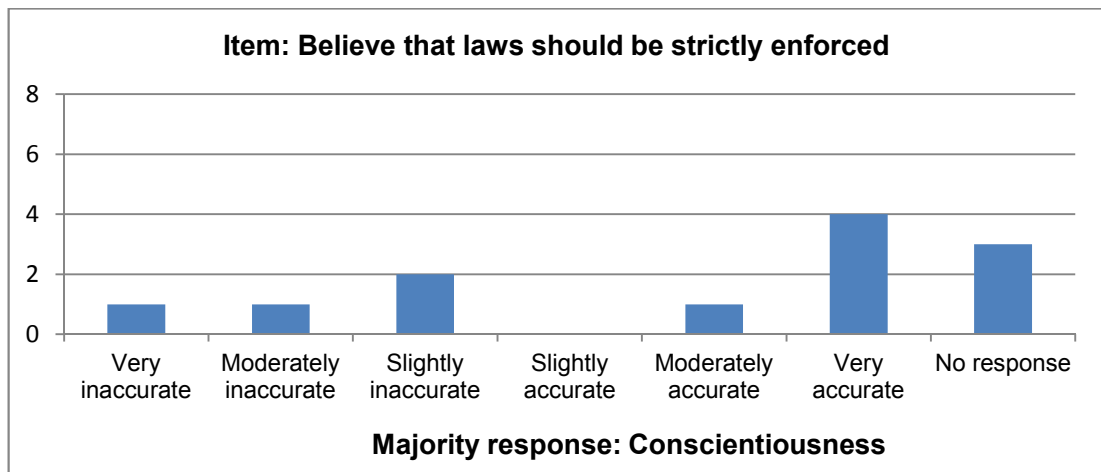


Figure 27

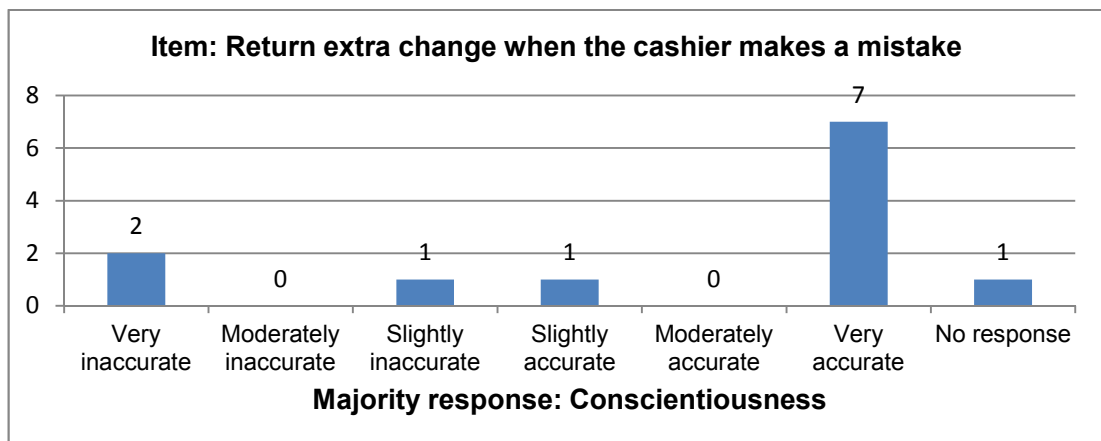




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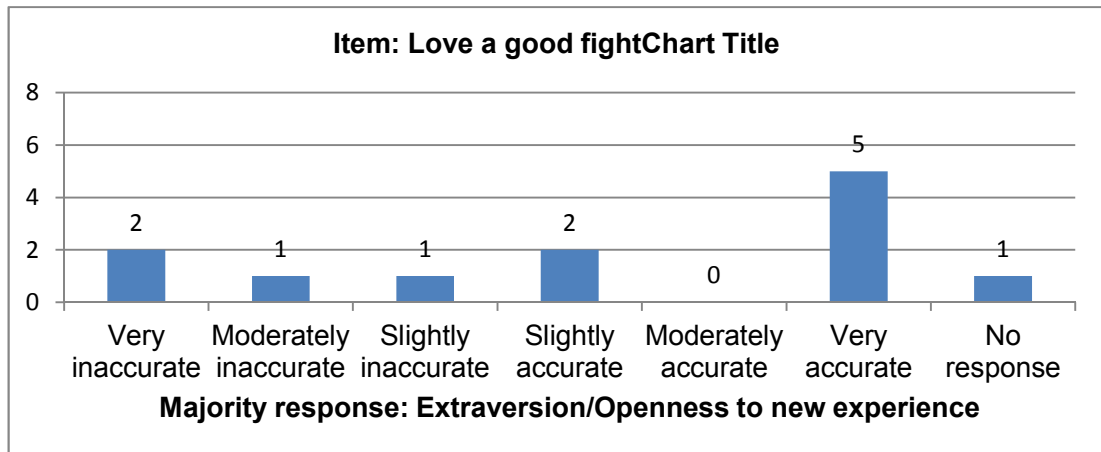


Figure 29

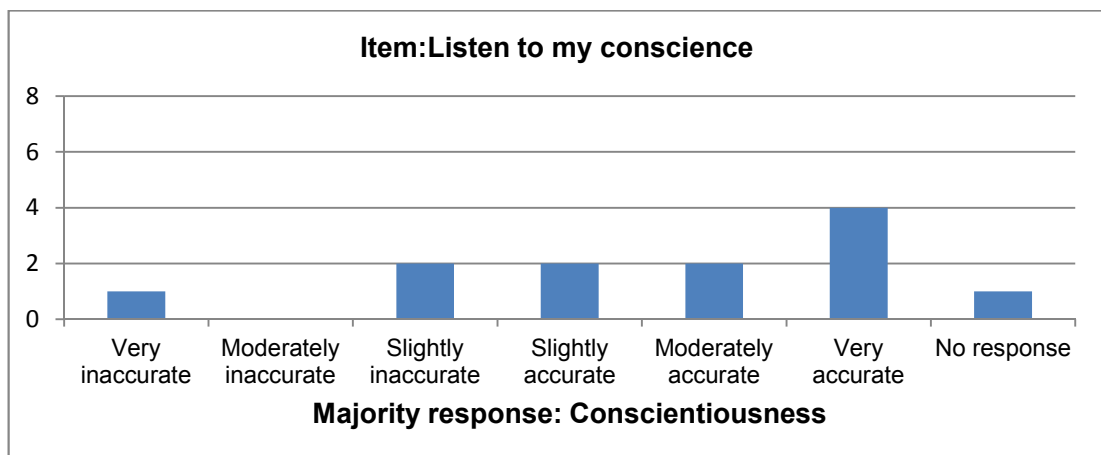
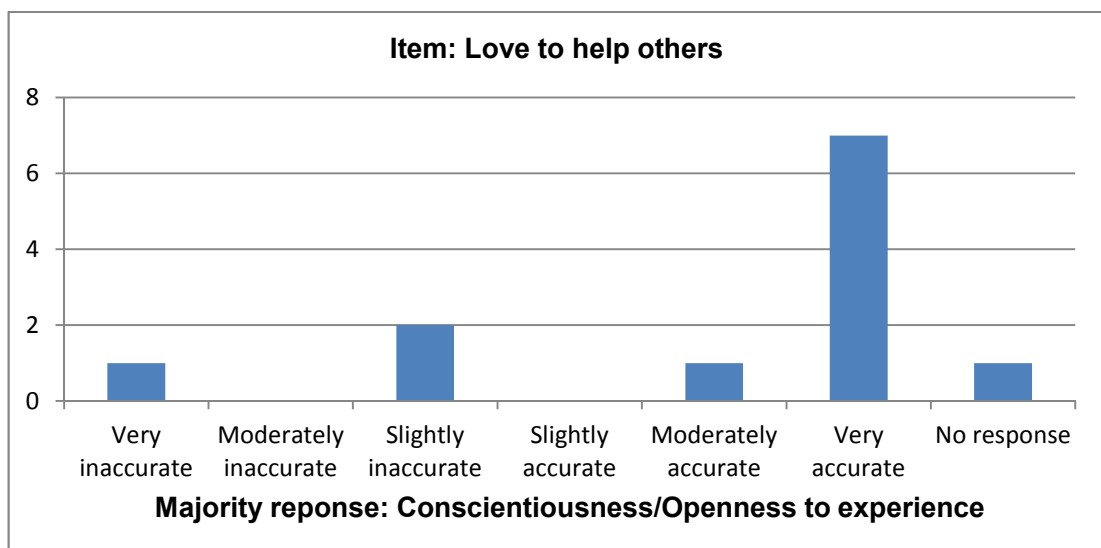


Figure 30



## **5.2.2. Analysis of results obtained**

### **5.2.2.1. Value placed on social relationships**

Most respondents indicated a positive outlook on social relationships, although to varying degrees, as evidenced by majority favourable responses to PTS items reflecting openness towards others and a willingness to adapt to different personalities. Majority responses on this theme reflect a basic appreciation for relationship qualities of the kind that have the effect of extending them over time, like respect and generosity, and their acknowledgement of co-responsibility to construct social relationships. Loneliness was rejected as an option by most respondents as they valued a communal sense more highly. While it appears important for them to take on new challenges in life, it seemed equally important for the majority to be useful to others.

By contrast with these findings, a reduced number of respondents expressed opposite views regarding social relationships. Their responses to related items reflected complete dissatisfaction with social relationships and a preference to remain detached from others. Due to their sense of disappointment, they felt no interest in others and wished to be left alone. These respondents also checked positively on items measuring sense of grievance, like bearing grudges and feeling vindictive. They admitted inability to feel others' emotions and looking out entirely for themselves. Perhaps, they felt that their destitute condition resulted from a breakdown of available solidarity within their group of reference and blamed their previously available social contacts for their current state.

#### **5.2.2.2. Sense of competition**

Another major theme that emerged from respondents' answers to the PTS concerns sense of competition. Regardless of positive feelings about social relationships, most respondents indicated their preference for competition over cooperation and, therefore, a tendency to not rely on others at this time. This position was confirmed in majority favourable responses to the belief that people should fend for themselves. Despite the fact that a majority provided positive responses to survey items like: thinking of others first, taking time out for others, enquiring about other's wellbeing, feeling other's emotions, anticipating the need of others, and loved to help others, and provided contrary responses to items like: am not really interested in others, am out for my own personal gain, am not interested in other people's problems, and feel little concern for others, higher value placed on competition seemed to have a strategic meaning at this time.

In the course of daily contacts with different study participants, a noteworthy impression was that they had to appear tough and in control of their situation at all times in others' presence, in order to not project an image of frailty and weakness. To give others a sense that they were struggling and, therefore, needed others' assistance, might have negative consequences, like being taken advantage of or even the possibility that word might eventually get back to their families that they weren't doing well. Since they all presented themselves in similar fashion while around others, had one of them appeared differently, others may have simply concluded he was trying to manipulate others for his own advantage, and, therefore, stigmatised him further.

Emphasis on competition rather than on cooperation could also be based on their perception that, while under duress, it was important to focus on one's own

needs rather than on collective needs; the most they could get themselves to cooperate with others at this critical juncture was as far as supporting their own families and even that was a stretch.

#### **5.2.2.3. Morality and ethical behaviour**

Perceptions regarding one's own and others' sense of morality and ethical behaviour also influence perceptions of self and others' degree of trustworthiness. On this particular theme, most respondents acknowledged the value of respecting law and order. They were, in principle, not willing to take any short-cuts in this domain out of concern that others might consider them untrustworthy. They would be willing to censor any behaviour they considered deviant. However, some related responses reflected that certain respondents might be less dutiful about personal integrity and willing to deviate from the norm when prompted by extreme circumstances. At least four respondents were quite vehement in their belief that if it was a question of achieving something considered highly important, especially money, any means were justified to achieve it. The majority responses on related PTS items also reflect that a majority of respondents might break their promises under pressure and even manipulate others to get ahead in life. This response would confirm that some study participants saw their personal situation as extreme.

This apparent ambiguity could derive from the fact that study participants were immersed in a general context that was also not exempt of a high level of ambiguity. It was actually quite difficult to make out to what extent existing norms were valid in all instances. On one hand, restrictive governmental policies in relation to undocumented migrants conveyed a strong message that they were breaking the law by entering into and remaining on Spanish territory without required visas. On the other hand, a Spanish judge released many like them to the Spanish territory

after keeping them in prolonged detention. Then, local migrant support organisations, trade unions and employers in the underground economy showed willingness to cooperate with their plans, despite their awareness of existing restrictive policies concerning undocumented migrants. It could, therefore, be easy for undocumented migrants to conclude that beyond the letter of the law, the hidden message was that real life always makes room for exceptions. As long as they did not engage in criminal activity, they continued to consider themselves as essentially law-abiding citizens.

Although, to varying degrees, a majority of respondents stated their preference for acting responsibly, a majority were not entirely sure of others' sense of morality. This theme is reflected in mixed responses to the PTS items concerning others' trustworthiness. While, to varying degrees, it seems that most respondents would be willing to give others the benefit of the doubt, they also expressed hesitation about trusting what people say, since they believed that most people would lie to get ahead. They also reflected their disappointment over the fact of not having had equal access to opportunities for development, likely because others had failed to take their needs into proper consideration. From this perspective, their willingness to make exceptions to the rule as the situation might demand could reflect their perception that others would act similarly under those circumstances. Interestingly, four respondents considered that others were generally moral.

#### **5.2.2.4. Overall impression**

The combined scores obtained for personality traits supporting propensity to trust, i.e. Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience, outweigh by far the score obtained on Neuroticism, which is inversely related to propensity to trust. These scores, nevertheless, clearly show the existing

variation in propensity to trust within the study group. While a majority of respondents possess the basic personality traits that support propensity to trust, these traits vary in strength, as reflected in the high number of responses falling in the *moderately to slightly* range. These results could be an indication that available personality traits have come under strain during a period of considerable instability and, therefore, taken on a less definite quality for some respondents. It is also possible, from a strategic point of view, to emphasise certain personality traits and de-emphasise others to suit the circumstance.

A smaller portion of study participants, however, appears to be absorbed by worry and, consequently, show no sign of personality traits supporting propensity to trust. These study participants are likely the ones that appear most withdrawn and detached from others as they are currently unable to mobilise the kinds of personality traits that support trust and social connection.

#### **5.2.2.5. Study participants' final inputs on trust**

All survey participants attended the last Focus Group Interview with an interest in receiving feedback on the PTS. Their interest reinforced a sense that they had participated in this research activity out of their free will and expected to gain further insights from this experience. After thanking participants for providing this information, I communicated the basic findings with the expectation that different group members would amplify them with additional inputs.

An initial point of discussion concerned the basic finding regarding the existing variation in their individual propensity to trust. The point was made that, while the results showed that the larger portion of group members held at least a basic disposition to trust others, possibly connected with their own sense of personal trustworthiness, a smaller portion indicated a strong reluctance to trust others. An

initial question posed to all participants was whether, according to their perceptions, their propensity to trust others might have varied since departure from home country. This question was based on a sense that they all must have been rather open to establishing new social relationships when they decided to migrate transnationally. This question sparked yet another intense group discussion.

Sab took the lead and wished to explain why certain group members might be less inclined to trust at this stage. He said that it all came down to fear, since they felt largely unwelcomed by the autochthonous population. They preferred to avoid self-exposure in the delicate situation they were caught in. Jai expanded on this explanation by adding that, based on his acquired experience in alternative European contexts, Spaniards are more racist than nationals from any other country in the EU. It was far easier for him to relate to foreigners living in or visiting Spain than to Spaniards. He completed his remarks by stating that he would surely be better off anywhere else in Europe. No one else shared an alternative view. According to Sab this fear justified an exclusive focus on making money in order to shorten their stay as much as possible before final return to home country.

In line with this logic, Sab acknowledged that in the meantime, it was a question of getting by with few local contacts and compensating for that deficit by trying to stay in touch as much as possible with family or friends back home, via email or sending SMS'. Although he admitted that this might be hard since most come from places where their social life was rather intense, (he provided his own example by stating that he had over 200 cousins and that many more friends back home) he saw no alternative course of action. When I raised the possibility that there might be locals that are far more receptive to migrants from wherever they originated and regardless of their resident status, Jai retorted that if they were open it probably

meant that they had the intention of exploiting them. From his perspective, the larger segment of the local population held very negative attitudes towards African migrants in particular, which warranted maintaining a low social profile in order to avoid the humiliation that would derive from exposure to acts of discrimination and racism, arrest and deportation.

### **5.3. Key stakeholder contributions**

This exploration of inhibiting factors for social connection among undocumented migrants of African origin includes consultations with administrative staff in charge of the emergency accommodation programme to collect their personal views on this topic. Administrative staff willingly shared their acquired perspectives, built over an extensive period of contact with undocumented migrants from African nationalities. Two of the administrators were from the same African country that a certain number of residents came from and had been undocumented at some point in the past as well, so, were in a good position to discuss this topic.

The Barcelona-based migrant support association they represented, and in partnership with a local Social Studies Research Group, had already conducted a couple research projects that sought to understand the general life conditions of undocumented migrants of Sub Saharan origin residing in Spain. In a 2008 study titled: *Welcoming networks and living conditions of immigrant arrivals in the Canary Islands*, lead researchers Raul Martinez and Paolo Leotti led a team of data collectors during the implementation of a phone survey with identified, legally-established migrants from African countries that may have hosted up to three new migrants in the recent year. The aim of this survey was to understand the impact that hosting migrant newcomers had had on their families.



One dimension of the survey explored social relationships in order to learn about the kinds of resources (both intra-individual and external) that are most frequently mobilised by both hosts and migrant guests to establish and maintain positive relationships. The authors highlighted group solidarity as a major resource within African ethnic communities. However, researchers also found that the sharp increase in new migrant arrivals in Spain since 2005 had strained the capacity of already established family members or co-ethnic contacts to offer usual hospitality to newcomers. As new arrivals that were being hosted encountered difficulties to maintain their jobs, they also tended to prolong their stays in established living arrangements, thus, preventing the absorption of newly arrived undocumented migrants.

This finding implies that even before the onset of the 2008 global economic crisis, many African undocumented migrants residing in Spain may have lacked significant social contacts that could provide meaningful social support. Administrative staff highlighted the fact that even before the economic recession set in, the emergency accommodation was already registering high demand for beds by new migrant arrivals. In light of these developments, it becomes quite comprehensible that administrative staff members would express interest in gaining a better understanding about the ways in which African undocumented migrants might be assisted to establish social supports without exclusive recourse to their established ethnic communities. Administrative staff members had noted that different individuals varied in their capacity to build their social networks.

From their particular point of view, the fact that some residents adopted a passive stance in this kind of situation was, actually, quite incomprehensible, knowing about the painstaking efforts they personally made to reach Spain through a lengthy and perilous journey by land and sea. Their sense was that this seemingly

illogical reaction might be explained by the fact that, since their migration project was a family project with a nearly exclusive economic motivation, when they became unemployed, finding a new job became a source of constant worry. To engage in social relationships at this stage might be considered counterproductive as those they might more easily enter into contact with (other undocumented migrants) were all competing for the same scarcely available job opportunities.

Sense of competition is bound to arise among members of different ethnic groups that are regularly exposed to precarious life situations. This effect would likely be still more pronounced in a situation of job market decline. When this point was explored with different study participants, several shared the same sense that the tendency in this kind of situation might be to keep hints on possible jobs to oneself based on concern that if others found out, they might take the job first.

Concerns expressed by emergency accommodation administrators regarding undocumented migrants' social responses resonated with wider interest expressed by migration observers and supporters in Catalonia regarding the question as to why certain ethnic groups in Barcelona appeared more integrated than others. At a migration conference in Barcelona in 2010 where numerous research studies were presented in relation to this topic, the discussion centred on deficits in institutional responses, including migrant associations, to facilitate migrant integration. The focus of these responses seemed to be on welcoming new arrivals rather than on addressing the longer-term integration needs of migrants that had already been living in context for several years. Longer term migrants unmet expectations of these institutions and associations had, therefore, caused many to not consider them as a solid reference. They only approached them rarely.

Membership in cultural associations was, consequently, very low, which prevented these associations from generating membership revenue to increase their operational capacity. The lack of a solid financial structure underpinning these entities was seen as a major impediment to strengthen their response capacity. Established migrants also considered that these centres were mainly set up to serve the interests of those that led them and that they were, consequently, out of touch with the real problems migrants were experiencing in the community. There was a dissonance between public speeches and action.

On another level, the concern revolved around the perceived low level of interaction between certain migrant groups and the wider context. A noted fact was that there were few spaces that served to foster social interaction between migrant groups and the autochthonous population. There was hardly any political investment in initiatives to engage migrants in the communities where they lived, at least not enough to counter discriminatory currents in society. Only the reduced number of migrants that had the possibility of establishing a small commerce, show their art, or play a role in politics, were able to engage with the wider society to an adequate level. Quite clearly, the system was not doing much to incorporate migrants into the social fabric and the larger number of migrants was growing increasingly distrustful due to their lack of civic participation and inability to use their personal efficacy. There was an acknowledgement to the fact that migrants bring resources with them that may help them form social links that were not being brought forth due to the lack of opportunities for personal expression.

From this perspective, the emphasis was placed on the need to improve migrant access to available resources so as to facilitate linkage. This strategy was all the more necessary for the fact that the migratory process was being carried out

increasingly under extreme conditions, causing effects on mental health that could, potentially, affect social engagement.

#### **5.4. General conclusion**

What has been described so far in this chapter is the situation of increased vulnerability in which study participants found themselves after becoming destitute in the context of the 2008 global economic crisis. As a result of persistent unemployment, they not only lost contact with their previously available social networks but also faced numerous additional pressures that could, potentially, hinder their capacity to restore these much needed networks. Quite importantly, it obliged them to consider the need to approach members from different ethnic groups they were scarcely familiar with beforehand while confined to their tight-knit ethnic communities. Would members from other ethnic groups live up to their trust expectations? Nothing could be less certain in this economically deteriorated environment where no one had the ability to engage in a traditional social dynamic of reciprocal solidarity. Quite on the contrary, those they might more easily relate to, i.e. the emergency accommodation residents were more likely to compete for the same scarcely available jobs.

In this context, the risk of further betrayal beyond what many could have already experienced since leaving their home country was high, especially since residents from different ethnic groups were not bounded by ethnic affiliation. Why attempt to reconstitute their social networks anyway considering the temporariness of their current living arrangements? As far as forming social connections with more socially distant individuals belonging to the autochthonous population, study participants had developed, and probably quite justifiably, a perception of increased hostility towards international migrants like them deriving from the economic recession, which made

this avenue appear less feasible than usual at this time. While evolving in their small social networks, they had neither developed the necessary level of language skills and cultural awareness that would make them feel confident enough to bridge social contact with members of the autochthonous population.

The overall contextual configuration they were caught in could not be less conducive to catalyse new social connection.

### **5.3. Available social resources in context**

We have seen that study participants were facing numerous structural risk factors that could impinge on their capacity to socially connect. It is also important to consider whether and to what extent they made use of available social resources in context that could help them circumvent these risks. Field observations revealed a range of potential social resources both at emergency accommodation and community levels. This part of the analysis, therefore, discusses findings regarding available social resources in study participants' setting and describes the use they made of them, as observed during the fieldwork.

#### **5.3.1. Emergency accommodation-based social opportunities**

##### **5.3.1.1. Overlapping routines**

Life at the emergency accommodation afforded residents several opportunities for social interaction amongst each other because their daily routines overlapped at different points. All residents ate three free meals a day at this hostel to save on food expenses and gathered in the living room area at meal serving times, with few exceptions. During these gatherings, residents from same ethnic backgrounds tended to sit next to each other and engage in conversations in their local dialect, and only superficially acknowledge the presence of residents from other nationalities. Those who were on their own typically ate in silence. At times, different

residents would comment on the quality of the meal served, which had been prepared by the resident that was on kitchen duty that given week. Usually, comments were negative, which sparked some exchanges among other residents in the same vein. In a general sense, this social resource was not exploited by study participants to its full potential.

#### **5.3.1.2. House chores**

All residents had different weekly house chores and had to participate in general cleaning day once a week, which offered them further opportunities for social interaction. Residents could help each other out to complete these chores satisfactorily or even replace each other when a resident could not carry out his chore on schedule. Nevertheless, most residents scarcely interacted around these chores. Rather, they all felt that their chore was an imposed duty, which they had to carry out by themselves as everyone had enough with his own. In any event, support lent while carrying out house chores would more likely come from like-ethnic contacts if they had any at the emergency accommodation.

#### **5.3.1.3. Mini-laptop**

The mini-laptop computer that was made available to them could also, potentially, catalyse social connections, since the larger majority took great interest in this resource. One opportunity was negotiating times for laptop use. Those who were interested in using it on a given day had to sign up for it. Study participants had opportunities to inform each other about their computer needs and negotiate around times for its use. When their allotted time was up and they still had not completed their task, they could negotiate with those on standby to extend their period of usage. Some residents were still unfamiliar with the internet, so the more computer-

confident ones could help them open a new email account, sign on to social media, and browse the internet for available job vacancies.

However, opportunities offered by the availability of a free lap-top for resource and knowledge sharing amongst residents, in reality became more often something to argue over, as different residents frequently wished to hold on to it well over the agreed upon timeframe for individual use. Only a few study participants seemed to be willing to occasionally assist less knowledgeable users, which meant that they had to rely mostly on the researcher for assistance.

#### **5.3.1.4. Interest in football**

Most study participants were interested in football. Several expressed their life aspiration to join a local football club and develop a career in professional football. Some had already joined local Spanish teams in the past but were unable to sustain these contacts since it became hard to pay the required membership fees after losing their jobs. While waiting for further opportunities to carry out these plans, they followed their favourite teams in the Spanish and European leagues very closely as well as any TV sports programmes in which football matters were amply discussed. The 2010 FIFA World Cup, in which several African country teams took part, sparked great interest among a majority of residents. Common interest in football, therefore, could be a major catalyser of social connection among residents.

Potential exchanges among residents around this topic were further facilitated by the fact that there was only one large coloured TV set at the emergency accommodation and, therefore, they had to sit together in the living room to view any sporting event. Most took advantage of these opportunities to share their knowledge about football teams and personal impressions about who might win. While doing so, they might discover that other residents they barely knew about

supported the same team they did and this recognition could lead to further friendly exchanges. However, what happened most often was that members from different ethnic subgroups engaged in heated debates to prove their respective points. These exchanges often ended by study participants drawing negative comparisons between their countries of origin, making it seem less likely that they would strike up a meaningful friendship.

#### **5.3.1.5. Skills in high demand**

A few residents possessed specific skills that were in high demand by others and were willing to share these skills free of charge at a moment when the large majority were unable to pay for similar services in the community. This skill-sharing attitude could also facilitate social connection amongst them. A clear example of highly appreciated skills was haircutting, which at least two residents possessed. Most residents sought their services, demonstrating that possessing specific skills can be a particularly valuable resource to form social connections in difficult times.

#### **5.3.1.6. Weekly support group/focus group interviews**

Scarce interaction among study participants as observed while they went about their daily routines implied that opportunities for group-based support were being largely overlooked by residents. In my role as researcher-supporter, I, therefore, thought it might be useful to launch a weekly support group meeting that would bring all residents together and provide a context in which they could possibly recognise each other as a source of potential social support. This approach would not only offer them further opportunities to rebuild their social networks but also provide a good vantage point from which to observe their interactional patterns and understand their issues around social connectedness.



Since the aim of this group was to help residents recognise the potential for further support within the group, the choice was made to organise the group around mutual aid principles, since these types of groups usually prove effective for this specific purpose. As described by Moyse Steinberg, D. (2008) mutual aid groups start by helping group members identify their common interests, which can be achieved gradually as the group leader encourages them to share their experiences and acquired perspectives and recognise the underlying commonality of their life experiences. This is referred to as the “all in the same boat phenomenon”. Once they have acknowledged their common interests, they can then set common goals and work together to accomplish them, each contributing personal assets.

This type of group seemed highly relevant for the selected group of participants in this study, in consideration of their culturally-influenced expectations to restore a mechanism of reciprocal solidarity as an indispensable condition to engage in social connection. By forming new social ties within the group of residents, they might not only recover their lost sense of community after loosening ties with their established social networks but also diversify their sources of social support, which they needed since their usual social contacts within their ethnic communities were not as available as before the crisis set in.

Although emergency accommodation administrators made attendance to this weekly support group mandatory for all residents, it was interesting to note how different study participants reacted to this proposal. Some appeared to not be threatened by the idea of coming together as a group to share their experiences and points of view. However, others appeared to receive this proposal more reluctantly. Perhaps, out of deference to others' contrary feelings, those that appeared more willing to participate adopted a cautious approach at the outset. It was also possible that they preferred not to be perceived at variance with the rest of the group, out of

fear of stigmatisation by peers. To be stigmatised by peer group members would only make their life still harder than it already was at this time. Nevertheless, they at least attended the weekly meetings on a regular basis.

As the weekly support group meetings progressed, it became apparent that residents used this open forum mainly to express their dissatisfaction over a number of different issues, which they did not have the opportunity to discuss in other contexts. Although, in a general sense, issues raised referred to the insufficient social support available to them at the emergency accommodation, it was enough for one resident to openly acknowledge the lack of trust between them to set in motion a flurry of responses regarding the trust issue. It was as if the group as a whole had suddenly realised that this meeting could also be an appropriate place to discuss internal group social dynamics.

The issue of trust has already been highlighted in the literature as essentially important for undocumented migrants. Given the overall group's interest in this particular topic, it, therefore, seemed appropriate to extend this discussion as much as possible, both to help residents recognise their common interest through these exchanges and understand the extent to which trust issues might be affecting residents' personal disposition to socially connect. Perhaps, residents would start to participate more actively in the groups now that a single topic they considered relevant had been identified. Since there was only 1 month left before the conclusion of this field work by the time that study participants began to talk about trust, the choice was made to use the remaining weekly meetings to focus on this topic. This more focused discussion could lead to other revealing topics.

The focus group interview format lent itself appropriately for this purpose. As already described in the methodology chapter, participants in focus group interviews

have a chance to share their perceptions and opinions on certain topics and then listen to others' contributions, prior to further elaborating on their own. Although there is no certainty that they will achieve consensus on a particular topic, they may find that others' views are complementary to their own and, therefore, find a common ground of understanding that fosters social connection.

Despite clear indications that the group may benefit from an extended discussion on trust, their interest in elaborating further on this topic was, actually, mixed. Some appeared to keep their distance from the group after the initial discussion by finding excuses to not attend group sessions. Others maintained regular attendance but felt less encouraged to engage in this type of discussion while others were absent. However, all except for one agreed to complete the Propensity to Trust Scale. After filling out this survey, study participants willingly participated in one final session that served to amplify their responses to survey items. Quite interestingly, during this last session, several study participants gave more emphasis to external threats, like racism, discrimination, exploitation, to explain their difficulties around trust than on any differences lying within the group itself.

#### **5.3.1.7. Migrant support associations**

The migrant support association that ran the emergency accommodation had established cooperative ties with the local NGO Education without Borders, which offered residents free Spanish and Catalan language lessons at the flat, according to a group teaching model. Participation was entirely voluntary but encouraged by administrators. Aside from providing them a highly accessible opportunity to improve their language skills, this resource exposed study participants to sympathetic members of the autochthonous population, through whom they might gain a more balanced perspective about local perceptions regarding international migrants.

These contacts could also help them gain greater cultural awareness. Another important benefit of attendance to these lessons was that it could stimulate further interaction among participants after classes, as the need to complete homework assignments and practice their newly acquired language skills in-between lessons could encourage them to seek each other out for support.

Despite the advantages offered by availing themselves of this type of support, only a minority of study participants actually took advantage of it. Perhaps, the assumption most held was that it was pointless to invest their energies in learning the language if the typical jobs they could access in the service industry or in agriculture did not require proficiency in local languages. In their current economic situation, they might have considered that it was far more important to invest all of their energies in finding those jobs as quickly as possible than on taking time out to learn new skills that might have helped them find better jobs in the long term.

#### **5.3.1.8. Weekend group outings**

Another social resource that study participants could easily access during their period of residence at the emergency accommodation was the possibility of taking part in weekend group outings that were being funded by the migrant support association. A total of six different outings were organised by the researcher during the fieldwork period. Study participants could contribute their own ideas for outings during weekly support group meetings. The overall aim of these outings was, on one hand, to facilitate residents' links with available cultural and leisure resources in the city of Barcelona, and to orient them geographically so that they could move around more independently. On the other hand, it was hoped that while participating in these group activities residents would become more acquainted with each other and intensify their contacts. A camera was made available to facilitate picture-taking for

those who did not have one, so that they could then upload their pictures onto social media to share with family and friends.

An initial observation regarding their participation in weekly group outings is that, while there was a core group of residents that participated quite regularly in any proposed outing, there was another portion of residents that only participated occasionally beyond the initial outing to the Zoo. This is despite the fact that everyone expressed high satisfaction with the initial outing. It did not seem like the reason behind irregular participation was lack of interest in the proposed activity. Had this been the case, residents had the option of requesting an alternative plan. Another observation was that some did sign on but then changed their mind at the last moment.

### **5.3.2. Community-based social resources**

In relation to the community-based supports, it must be noted that local organisations with a mandate to support migrants, like NGO's and same-country cultural associations that under normal conditions would be able to operate different support programmes, could now no longer afford to maintain such programmes as local governments drastically reduced their available funding due to the economic recession. Coupled with increased demand for assistance by migrants during the economic recession, these organisations found that their capacity to formulate an adequate response with scarce means was seriously compromised. Most were obliged to limit support provided to basic material assistance.

To make matters worse, another observation was that study participants appeared quite disoriented with respect to what the context could offer them in the way of support. They were largely unaware of available community resources they could access as district residents (with proof of residence provided by the migrant

support association) regardless of their legal resident status. An example of a district-based resource that might have been useful to them at this point was a nearby job centre. Support provided at this centre, free of charge to district residents, included job postings and coaching services to fill out CV's and prepare for job interviews. Study participants were informed about this by the researcher and four residents expressed interest in exploring this resource. However, even after accompanying the interested residents to the job centre to assist with registration procedures, they did not return on their own a second time, expressing a feeling that the service was not properly adapted to their particular needs. The remaining eleven residents never even tried. Quite clearly, their unfamiliarity with the wider system was now making it more difficult to access services.

The following are the identified major community-based social resources that study participants could possibly access while residing at the emergency accommodation:

#### **5.3.2.1. Church or mosque**

All study participants identified themselves as either Christian or Muslim. Their faith in God represented a major resource to launch and maintain their migratory project. Their conviction was that it was only God's decision whether their migration plans succeeded or not. They just had to implement their plans and accept their fate. If they were able to progress despite the many dangers along their path, it had to mean that God stood by them. Any setbacks encountered along the way were only God's way of testing their faith. If they held strongly to their faith, they would eventually succeed and also draw closer to God, according to God's ultimate plan for their lives. From this perspective, it was important to stay strong in one's faith by regularly attending church or mosque according to prescribed religious rites.

There were a number of churches and mosques that study participants could access in their immediate surroundings. One of the mosques, a small one, happened to be situated within a few metres of the emergency accommodation. Certain churches or mosques attract members from specific ethnic groups, which, therefore, could also serve as a space to meet and establish social relationships with fellow countrymen. The Pastors or Imams that lead these congregations usually provide individual counselling for individuals caught in distressful life situations, which could be another valued form of support during this critical period in study participants' lives. All residents participated regularly in church services or prayers at the nearest church or mosque. Several shared that they sought their Pastor or Imam's counsel during these gatherings.

#### **5.3.2.2. Same-country cultural associations**

The various African countries study participants came from had opened a national association office in Barcelona. These national associations usually propose a programme of social and cultural events aiming to attract both same-country nationals and members of the local community, in order to intensify cultural awareness and exchange among members from different ethnic communities. They also advocate for migrant rights and provide information to newcomers on existing resources they may need to facilitate settlement.

However, most study participants consulted about their links with same-country national associations referred to these entities as largely irrelevant in their lives. They scarcely approached them since they were not confident that these organisations could do anything for them. These centres were viewed by most study participants as representing only the interests of a reduced number of same-country nationals that started them. They were not able to pay membership fees either as requested to support their country's national association's activities.

On occasion, though, locals wishing to implement projects involving Africans could call upon national associations belonging to African countries to facilitate contacts. Representatives posted in these offices would refer these calls to local migrant support associations that were working closely with African migrants. This occurred on a few occasions during the fieldwork when, for example, a local film crew wished to recruit young African males for a short film. They asked the migrant support association whether they could refer any potential candidates. After announcing this offer to the entire group of study participants, only four expressed interest in applying. Three of them were finally recruited, although only for a day's work. Similarly, a running course at a local university sought undocumented migrants of African origin to share their migration experiences. Only two residents volunteered to take part. The only reason why a number of undocumented migrants in a dire economic situation would refuse these opportunities is that they preferred to avoid exposing themselves to the larger public.

#### **5.3.2.3. Local trade unions**

Trade unions could serve as a useful intersection point between undocumented migrants, legally-established migrants and members of the autochthonous population since they offer free access to vocational training in different trades for all community members regardless of resident status. Certificates issued by trade unions at the end of training can then help graduates to become employed in different sectors. Although some of the older study participants had already received some vocational training in different trades, most of the younger ones had not. Due to the fact that prospects of becoming re-employed during the economic recession were poor, the possibility of acquiring further training through this avenue might have been an option worth considering. However, once again, this offer of community-based support met with resistance by most study participants. Since



attendance to the course did not include a living allowance, it would be understandable that many study participants felt more inclined to seek immediate solutions to their dire economic situation than attend classes.

#### **5.3.2.4. Advocacy platform for undocumented migrant rights**

Undocumented migrants, like participants in this study, could link up with the local platform “Papers for all”, which advocated for the regularisation of all undocumented migrants, an end to migrant detention centres and government deportation practices. This social movement, which brought together a mix of migrants and solidarious members of the local population, regularly organised public demonstrations in strategic urban locations to raise public awareness of migration policies that are insensitive to human rights and cause increased vulnerability among international migrants. The platform, evidently, depended on a large turnout of undocumented migrants to increase pressure on decision-makers. Undocumented migrants could, on their part, establish new social links via their involvement in these activities. Most study participants declined participation in these demonstrations, as they reported that these gatherings were monitored by police intent on deporting them. This common reaction showed the extent to which undocumented migrants are involved in a constant risk-benefit analysis to ensure their safety.

#### **5.3.2.5. Community-based activity groups**

A number of different community-based groups were reaching out to the general public to get individuals involved in various voluntary, cultural and leisurely activities. Activities organised by these groups could range from voluntary work in hospitals and nursing homes to city walking or biking tours and participation in street events. These types of groups are particularly receptive to newcomers and otherwise non-

integrated members of the community that may not have extensive social networks and wish to expand them.

During one of the daily visits to the emergency accommodation, I noticed that one of the study participants was wearing a caption T-Shirt with an image of human towers, a Catalan tradition dating back to the 18th century and which has been declared by UNESCO to be amongst the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. When asked where he had seen these human towers, he mentioned that he had seen them a couple weeks ago in one of Barcelona's historic squares. The fact that others were listening in on this conversation, provided an opportunity to raise the group's awareness about available community based activity groups through which they could meet new people. However, this proposal was met with reservation by study participants. Usa, for example, expressed he had no desire to explore this kind of option because there was no economic benefit involved.

#### **5.3.2.6. Cyber centres**

Cyber centres have become a popular resource among migrants as they offer the opportunity to make international calls at cheap rates, make money transfers and connect to the internet. This community space is, therefore, highly conducive to meet new people and link up with other community resources that are commonly advertised on the cyber centre's billboard. Study participants, most whom could not afford to make international calls from their cell phones or purchase a personal computer, resorted to available cyber centres. However, after the mini-laptop was made available to them at the emergency accommodation, most preferred to use this computer for their communication needs, as a money-saving measure. Their visits to cyber centres also decreased because they had no money to transfer to families or creditors back in home country. This change may have deprived some of

further opportunities for social connection offered by regular attendance to cyber centres.

## **Chapter 6 – Discussion**

### **6.1. Contribution of the thesis**

This thesis considered the social impacts of loss of supportive relational structures in the lives of mostly young undocumented migrant adults of African origin living at an emergency accommodation in Barcelona, Spain consequent to the 2008 global economic crisis. As pointed out in the Literature Review, undocumented migrants arrive in the transnational context with little else than the clothes they are wearing. For the fact that they accessed Europe without entry visas, they are unable to obtain prerequisite legal resident permits to access available resources in context they require for stabilisation purposes. These impediments have the effect of prolonging the precarious and marginal situations they have endured throughout their often lengthy and desperate migration journeys. Established migrant social networks serve as their only reference for much needed social support while seeking to integrate into the transnational context (Flores-Yeffal, 2013).

Despite the essential role that migrant social networks play in undocumented migrant settlement and stabilisation in the transnational context, they are inherently fragile and sensitive to contextual changes, as this same author points out. Their maintenance depends significantly on the availability of jobs, as they would otherwise be unable to articulate solidarity among network members, according to members' expectations. Job market decline associated with the 2008 global economic crisis resulted in massive unemployment among undocumented migrants and consequent inability to maintain established links with available social networks. After becoming destitute, many undocumented migrants could only rely upon the public emergency system to cover their most basic needs, which could only provide limited support as it was equally affected by the economic downturn.

In this highly adverse life situation, undocumented migrants had few other means to access informal support systems than to try rebuilding their social networks. The risk of not doing so was to become increasingly dependent on the public welfare system and more marginalised than they already were, which could negatively affect their resiliency (Ungar, 2011). However, an initial observation during fieldwork for this research was that study participants' motivation to engage others in this adverse situation varied considerably; some appeared rather withdrawn, while others seemed unaffected in terms of their interactive capacity. These observations stimulated interest in understanding the reasons behind these differences as it seemed important for intervention design purposes to gain further insight into key factors that support resiliency in socially adverse situations that affect the most vulnerable members of society in particular.

An examination of resiliency theory applied to contexts of life adversity (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000; Dowdney 2007; Veale, 2010; Ungar, 2011, Masten and Obradovic, 2008) in line with a social-ecological theoretical perspective (Miller and Rasco, 2004), provided basic orientation to guide this enquiry. These theories highlight the value of identifying intra-individual and environment based resources that are vitally important to support individual resiliency in contexts of adversity. The application of this theory to this particular problem, therefore, suggests that differences in patterns of social engagement may lie in individuals' capacity to access and articulate a series of interwoven coping resources situated at both intra-individual and environmental levels, which, when matched, enable social connection despite adverse circumstances. The thesis takes these theoretical frameworks as basic reference and explores the kinds of resources that certain study participants mobilised to strengthen their relational support systems while caught in this crisis situation.

An important insight drawn from the Literature Review is that undocumented migrants engage in social relationships based on trust requirements that exceed those commonly found in regular migrant groups and in the wider society (Flores-Yeffal, 2013). Trust is a sensitive issue for undocumented migrants because multiple risk factors in their social environment may jeopardise their ability to maintain their migration project, such as the likelihood of being arrested by police and deported. According to this author's examination, citing other authors (Tilly, 2007; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993) undocumented migrants, therefore, go to great lengths to satisfy their trust expectations. A major consideration is whether they can appropriately engage in a social mechanism that enables exchanges of support according to accepted norms of reciprocity within their culture. If they are unable to sustain this basic resource in the transnational context owing to different factors, undocumented migrants might feel trust constrained and, therefore, less inclined to engage in social relationships.

These theoretical findings appeared highly relevant in relation to the study group as reciprocal solidarity or bounded solidarity, as referred to by Portes and Sensenbrenner, (1993) is a characteristic feature of social relationship within African cultures, especially in the rural areas study participants came from. The observed variation in patterns of social engagement among study participants could be related to difficulties some experienced to trust others as they were unable to activate this centrally important social resource after their like-ethnic social networks disbanded. However, it also became quickly apparent during the fieldwork for this research that over and above this particular circumstance, there were additional contextually-based risk factors that could, potentially, further constrain the restoration of this highly valued resource for migrant social connection.

The thesis, therefore, initially focuses attention on revealing the drivers of risk in study participants' social environment that could, potentially, weaken social mechanisms like reciprocal solidarity that enable social connection within undocumented migrant groups. This contextual analysis included consideration of relevant macro, meso, and micro level factors as the social-ecological paradigm of community psychology suggests is helpful to understand the widest range possible of different factors affecting psychosocial wellbeing and resilience in contexts of adversity. Against this backdrop, the thesis then considers the specific intra-individual and community based resources that helped study participants engage in relationships of reciprocal solidarity as required to facilitate social connection in ways that were acceptable to them. The difficulty to observe 15 study participants' use of available community based resources during the fieldwork was addressed by developing a series of in-house social resources intended to foster reciprocal solidarity amongst them. By observing their use of these resources, it was possible to capture a series of intra-individual resources that appeared to be particularly relevant to restore reciprocal solidarity.

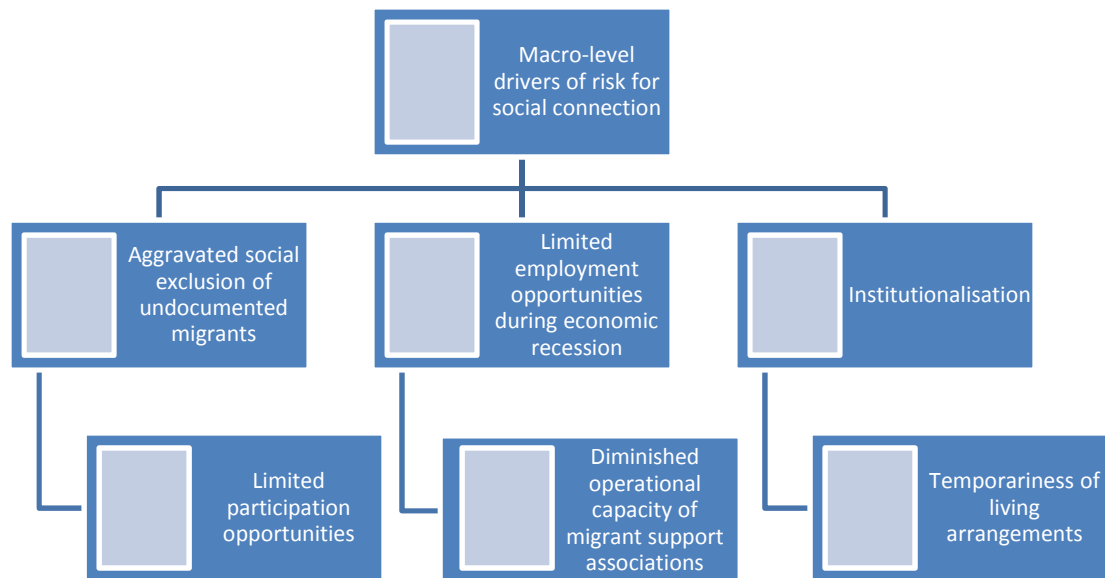
The following section provides answers to each of the two research questions posed in the thesis based on findings regarding the range of inter-connected risk and protective factors that influenced study participants' social connectivity in their current life setting.

## **6.2. Which factors hinder undocumented migrants' capacity to form and maintain social connections in this particular social environment?**

The data supports the view held by the Social-Ecological Paradigm of Community Psychology and Migrant Systems and Network Theory (Castles & Miller, 2009), that study participants were confronted with a series of demands at macro,

meso and micro levels that were difficult to address appropriately during the period of economic recession. Difficulties to meet important life demands because of lack of social support (Cohen and McKay, 1984) and stress associated with the expected consequences of failing to meet those demands (Sells, 1970) can adversely affect resiliency.

### 6.2.1. Macro level risk factors



Bellah et al. (1985) and Selznick, (1992), as cited in Flores-Yeffal (2013), state that achieving a greater understanding of the context in which individuals interact is important to better understand their attitudes toward cooperation. The analysis demonstrates that the contextual configuration in which study participants were evolving at the time of this study was highly disruptive to their psychosocial wellbeing as conceptualised by wellbeing frameworks cited in the thesis, (PWG, 2003; WeD, 2009; NEF, 2009; PLA, 2008). Findings indicate that study participants were unable to access and articulate a set of resources in different key dimensions as required to achieve an acceptable level of psychosocial wellbeing according to



their culturally influenced expectations. These combined pressures could negatively affect their interactive capacity.

The PWG framework (Ager & Strang, 2003), for example, highlights the importance of accessing economic resources for psychosocial wellbeing. The PLA framework further specifies that individuals draw a sense of wellbeing by taking responsibility for their families. International migrants set out on difficult journeys precisely with the expectation of prospering economically so that they can secure their families' wellbeing. Study participants were denied access to opportunities for economic wellbeing due to the persistent lack of job opportunities that were accessible to undocumented migrants during the economic recession. Most admitted that the impossibility of fulfilling their financial obligations towards their families and creditors was emotionally destabilising. In these conditions, finding new income generating opportunities wherever these might be found took priority over anything else, including socialising. The only relationships they appeared willing to consider at this point were those that might provide some support to overcome economic difficulties.

While concerned with their economic difficulties, findings show that study participants focused particular attention on finding low end jobs that provided fast cash. They were, therefore, less inclined to consider and engage in educational or training opportunities that could enhance their acquired knowledge and skills, which is another important dimension of wellbeing identified in reviewed frameworks. In this sense, they deprived themselves of any benefit they could possibly gain through participation in available environmental resources that were accessible to undocumented migrants. Although few and limited in their operational capacity due to funding shortages, those available may have rendered some useful service.

Findings, nevertheless, indicate that what a majority of study participants considered far more urgent during this critical period was to find immediate economic solutions.

Study participants could, understandably, be reluctant about engaging with environmental resources in a context they perceived to be largely unwelcoming to migrants of African origin. They were well aware of the fact that the Spanish government was prioritising a policy of undocumented migrant deportation during this period. They also perceived that racist and discriminatory attitudes towards African migrants by members of the local population were on the rise, fuelled by media and political platforms that portray international migrants as a societal problem. As a clear indication that their perceptions were not misguided, the Catalanian anti-immigrant political party Platform for Catalunya, which gained 17 seats in the Catalan parliament after the 2007 local election, jumped to 67 delegates after the 2011 elections (Hernandez Carr, A. 2014). Concerns over the likelihood of deportation and social rejection could discourage study participants from engaging with resources through which they could increase their participation and expand their cultural awareness, as useful to rebuild their social networks.

In their destitute condition, study participants also relied on an institutional structure to supply their basic needs for room and board, which, despite its service, also accentuated their feeling of being out of place. In this environment, they had to share their life space with strangers with little sense of privacy due to overcrowded conditions, and follow house rules that were strictly enforced by administrators, which was quite stress-producing. Many study participants reported that they did not sleep well. This set of conditions aggravated study participants' sense that they lacked control over their situation; poor sense of control has been noted to be a major source of stress in several studies. The fact that they were also cut off from

most outlets to release their accumulated stress as a consequence of their reinstitutionalisation could, therefore, be an added driver of risk for social connection. Continued institutionalisation for the younger study participants who had been transferred from a residential setting for minors upon turning 18 years old could prolong feelings of dependency on external aid rather than encourage them to seek out new social contacts.

Besides distress associated with re-institutionalisation, study participants had to deal with the effects of the temporariness of their situation. They knew they would have to relocate to another institutional setting after 3 months unless they found alternative housing arrangements, since the migrant support association could only offer them a bed for this length of time. They were not getting any support from this or any other public service to find alternative housing arrangements, which made them feel that relocation to a different emergency accommodation was almost certain by the time they would need to exit these living arrangements. In this fluid situation, several study participants expressed that since social relationships would likely be superficial unless they finally settled down somewhere, they saw no point in making efforts to rebuild their social networks.

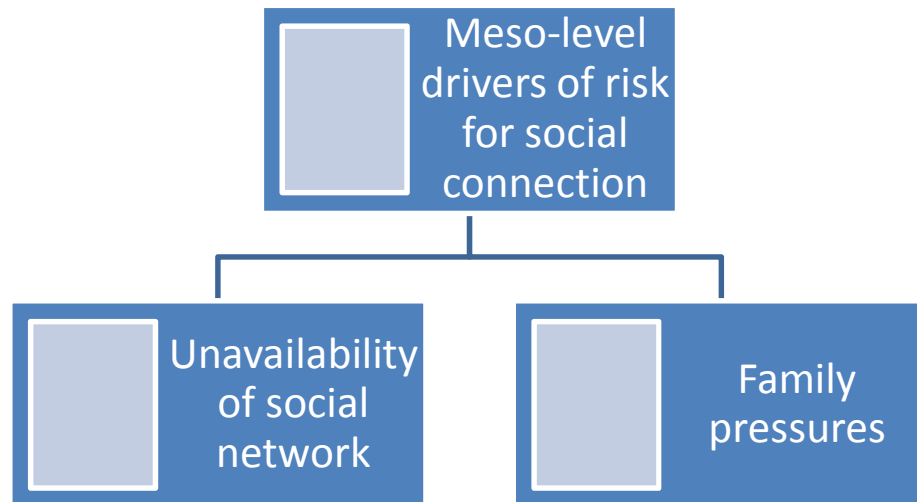
Application of Ager and Strang's (2008) Core Domains of Integration framework can be useful to conceptualise research findings regarding the range of structural drivers of risk for social connection that have been discussed in this section. Upon arrival in context, undocumented migrants do not have access to their basic rights as immigration authorities refuse to offer them legal resident status. As a result of these limitations, they are not able to access a series of facilitators that are useful to diversify their social networks, through which they can enjoy easier access to essential means of integration. Instead, they feel criminalised and seek cover

offered by small, like-ethnic social networks that despite any social support provided have limited capacity to achieve effective means of integration, partially because their links with broader networks remain weak, if they exist at all.

While confined to their small, like-ethnic social networks, undocumented migrants are obliged to accept employment that is poorly paid, exploitative and carried out in unsanitary conditions. Their housing is sub-standard. They are unable to benefit from educational opportunities due to lack of fluency in local languages, which is a facilitator of social connection. Their health is threatened by the fact that they rarely access health services out of concern that their personal information will be shared with immigration authorities that are intent on deporting them. Due to their marginal status, they do not feel welcomed by the local population. Migrants, according to Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) consider that a feeling of acceptance is essential to feel integrated.

All these adverse life conditions were further aggravated during the economic recession. At this stage, they had to deal with no employment, no housing, and further sense of estrangement from their social environment caused by institutionalisation and increased hostility towards international migrants, which discouraged them from seeking involvement with available community based resources that could lend some support. These combined circumstances posed a greater threat to their health and undermined conditions of trust required to maintain effective social engagement.

#### **6.2.1. Meso-level risk factors**



The Social-Ecological Paradigm of Community Psychology (Miller and Rasco, 2004) considers that migrant and refugee family and peer networks make a vital contribution towards psychosocial wellbeing in their arrival contexts. Castle and Miller (2009) refer to the influence of family, peers, and other intermediaries, as key meso-level factors. These key protective factors might represent a risk for migrants and refugees if they are unavailable, poorly functioning or exert negative influence on them. Data shows that all study participants were found in a situation where their available social networks had dwindled if not entirely disbanded and lacked regular contact with their families and friends back in home country. This abrupt change in their available support systems at a moment when they needed family and peers most to navigate the different challenges posed by the economic recession, created a series of pressures that could impinge on social connectivity.

Migrants' families figure importantly to ensure the success of the migration project. Families become involved in the migration project from its inception and remain involved until its conclusion, contributing different types of support for its satisfactory development. It is, therefore, understandable that international migrants

conceive their migration project as a family project rather than an individual one. Their joint collaboration is meant to draw benefits for the entire family unit. For this reason, study participants were extremely concerned about their inability to maintain the sending of remittances to their families once they lost their jobs and were unable to find new jobs in the depressed economy. Out of concern for failing to meet their families' expectations and tarnishing their image, they preferred to not contact their families at all, which resulted in cutting themselves off from fresh news about their families and much needed emotional support. Accumulated stress over inability to live up to family expectations and lack of communication with families led them to focus their energies on finding new income-generating opportunities and disregard any social relationships that did not promote this goal.

The maintenance of this life project also depends in no small measure on their association with peer networks in the transnational context, as these connections afford members the possibility of drawing on collective efficacy, which, as Flores-Yeffal (2013) states, is a vital social mechanism to address a wide array of problems, especially for undocumented migrants that are unable to access public supports due to their lack of legal resident permits. As the same author explains, undocumented migrants primarily seek integration in social networks for their ability to concentrate information on available job vacancies, and, perhaps, even facilitate job referrals. This fact is proven by research findings indicating that when the network ceases to be an effective avenue towards jobs, it breaks down, despite any other type of support it may have provided to its members. It otherwise makes sense to proceed in this way given their likely financial obligations towards intermediaries like migration loan sharks, which if unpaid, may create further negative pressure on themselves and on their families. Study participants were, therefore, not inclined to relate closely with other residents based on a perception that, since they were all

unemployed, they could not be useful to find new jobs. In this condition, they were more likely to compete over scarcely available jobs, which, as Schneider, Gruman & Coutts (2012) state, is bound to have a detrimental effect on their social relations.

While embedded in tight-knit, mostly like-ethnic social networks, study participants predictably engaged in social relationships according to set cultural norms of reciprocity that reinforce trust, as theorists like Flores-Yeffal (2013), Tilly (2007) and Dekker and Uslaner (2001) have found while studying undocumented migrants. My professional experiences in African rural communities support the view that solidarity among community members is important, in absence of a government-based welfare system. According to the referenced authors, undocumented migrant social networks are created in the transnational context to, basically, replicate this important social dynamic, as no other type of public support is available. However, in order to access the solidarity that is available through these networks, Flores-Yeffal found that it is crucial for members to adhere to certain trust considerations. For this reason, new members are selected according to criteria that ensure that they will meet trust expectations, such as belonging to the same culture, ethnic group, and religion.

What these findings imply is that, aside from their potential usefulness to link members up with available jobs, a major function of undocumented migrant networks is to ensure the safety of its members while they are continually exposed to multiple threats in the transnational context. For this reason, an important benefit from belonging to this type of network is to help members determine appropriate relationship choices. After loosening ties with their available social networks in the context of the 2008 global economic crisis, only the portion of study participants that had a small group of like-ethnic contacts they could relate to while living at the emergency accommodation could continue to benefit from these trusted filters.

Those that could not, may have felt that their capacity to engage in social relationships was compromised, as they had no effective means of verifying that unfamiliar individuals had internalised similar codes that regulate social relationship in their culture.

It must be added that young, single, and unaccompanied migrant males like the participants in this study have been found to be among the most isolated migrants in Spain (De Miguel Luken, V. et al. 2005). Several studies have shown that when labour migrants move as a family, they have more chances to integrate successfully in their arrival countries, as mothers belonging to migrant and non-migrant families usually establish social relationships rapidly while engaged in their children's schooling and, through those channels, involve their husbands in social interaction. The impossibility of benefiting from family reunification schemes in Spain, whether international migrants are legally established or not, therefore, deprived study participants from helpful intermediaries to establish social connection.

Without possibilities of reunifying with their families while living in the transnational context, undocumented migrants naturally develop strong social ties with members belonging to their peer networks. In this context of experience, they have little if any contact with non-network members, towards whom they may have developed negative attitudes depending on their history of relationships. In a major crisis situation that erodes their available social networks and gives rise to increased suspicion towards international migrants, they may be left with few if any social contacts they can rely upon for support and little information on available community supports. Furthermore, they may feel intimidated about approaching unfamiliar supports.



Evidently, near-exclusive association with their respective ethnic communities in the transnational context carries the benefit of offering network members a means of maintaining ties with their culture of origin, but when the social network disbands, members may find reaching out to alternative supports they are largely unfamiliar with rather demanding. While caught in adverse circumstances, African migrants would likely expect community members to notice their distress and offer support spontaneously, rather than having to ask for it in a formal way. However, in the European context, this kind of response is not likely to be the one they experience. Instead, they are obliged to locate and approach specific community resources like the emergency accommodation that offer the type of support they require, communicate their needs in a different language than their own and meet certain criteria to qualify for it. These demands may discourage them from attempting to establish alternative links and may result in feelings of dislocation, alienation, and worthlessness, with the belief that no one really cares about their distress.

A majority of participants in this study found this necessary adjustment, indeed, rather intimidating, not the least because they were well aware of local perceptions that many migrants come to live off the country's welfare system and they did not want to confirm these impressions. They also have strong suspicions that locals they might approach for their support needs will report them to immigration authorities intent on deporting them. With a heightened perception that they were unwelcomed in this society, several concluded that locals simply did not care what happened to them. For these reasons, they may have felt scarcely inclined to attempt social connections with locals.

Reference to Group Dynamics theory (Lewin, 1951) draws attention to the fact that the individual's behaviour reflects the state of the larger system to which he belongs and events affect it. Some study participants' social estrangement could,

therefore, be a reflection of their concerns about other network members they had lost contact with. In a new social situation, they were likely unable to perform similar roles as those they had played within their networks and which were useful to catalyse social connection. Loss of status held within their social networks was then compounded by loss of status as family providers and their acquisition of a new and unwanted status as beneficiaries of humanitarian aid. These new developments could be highly demoralising to study participants, and cause them to feel completely out of place and disconnected.

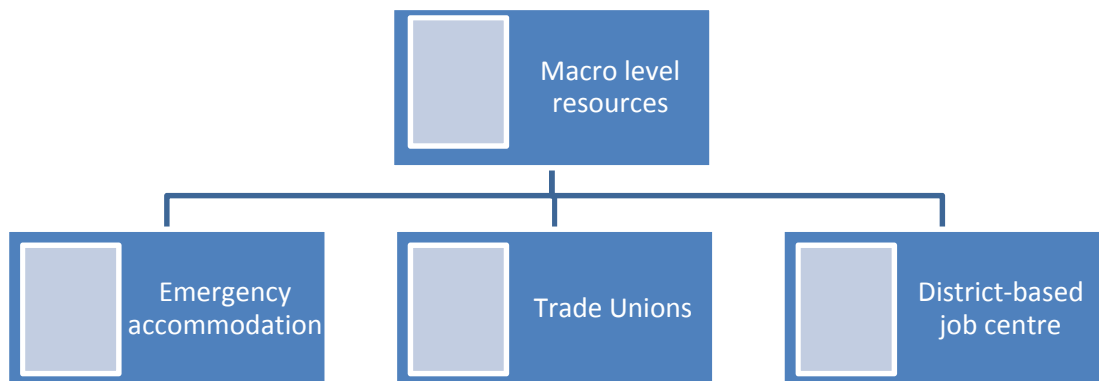
A final consideration regarding meso-level risk factors that could affect study participants' social connectedness during the period of this study is the likelihood that loss of social networks compounded still unresolved grief over distancing from family, friends and culture left behind upon leaving country of origin. Some study participants may have even experienced the traumatic loss of family and friends during their shared migration journeys, although they did not report this. From a social-ecological perspective, uprooted individuals need a sense of safety in order to appropriately address grief over losses endured in the context of life transitions. If they continue to face highly stressful life circumstances, their attention will normally be diverted to control these issues rather than deal with past experiences. This response is understandable in light of the need to prevent further experiences of loss.

Undocumented migrants do not enjoy a safe context upon arrival in Spain as they face continuous threats, which means that any additional loss they might experience compounds unresolved grief over previous losses. Accumulated grief may naturally result in increased social withdrawal and sense of detachment.

### 6.3. Which available resources could, potentially, facilitate social connection?

This section discusses theoretical contributions regarding social resources that are useful to establish and maintain social connection in adversity contexts and explores their relevance in light of research findings in this particular dimension. In accordance with the Social-Ecological theoretical perspective that guides this study, initial considerations focus on macro-level (institutional) supports followed by meso-level resources that have been identified in the available literature as theoretically relevant in contexts of adversity. Meso-level resources are sub-divided into community-based and emergency accommodation-based social resources for ease of reference.

#### 6.2.2. Macro-level resources



According to Dowdney, (2007) positive coping is dependent on a well-functioning support system in the contexts where individuals seek to integrate. Ungar (2011) also acknowledges that the possibility of accessing a wide range of available contextual resources through a process of continuous negotiation, as well as the capacity to make strategic use of them, is an important dimension of resilience. He adds that, when strained by adversity, the environment must respond

in adaptive ways in order to make resilience more likely to occur. The quality of the available resources matters for resilience. The analysis highlights the fact that, regardless of the level of functioning of public services in Spain, undocumented migrants are deprived of access to the public support system. They can only access few, basic institutional supports on an emergency (time-limited) basis, which prevents their settlement. In the context of the economic recession, these resources were among the most affected by funding cuts, which prevented them from responding to the need at required levels.

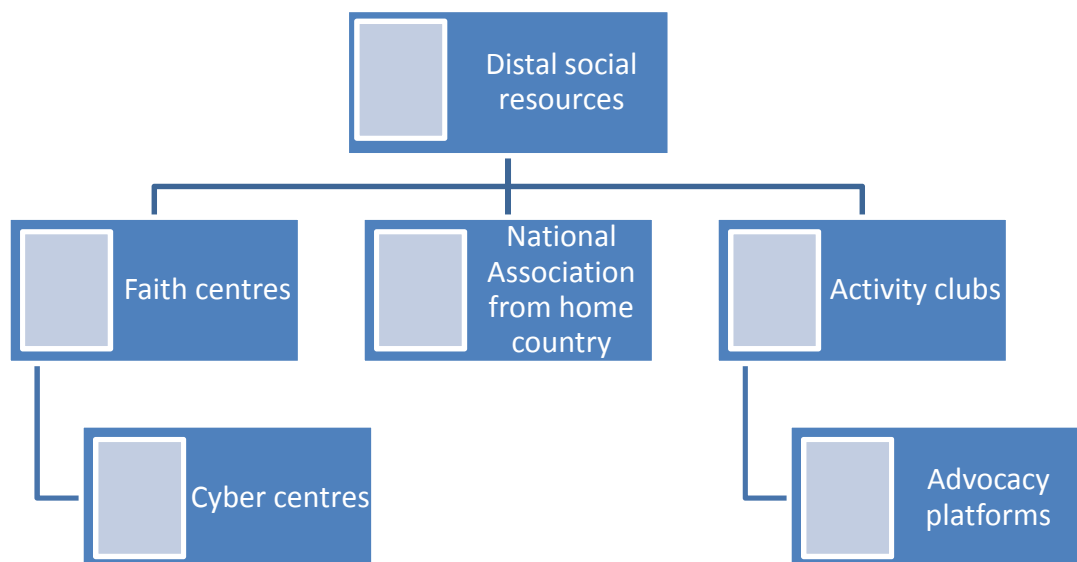
The data shows that institutionally-based social resources that study participants could access in their current life setting were, indeed, scarce. An obvious one was the publicly-funded emergency accommodation where fieldwork for this research took place. While residing at this shelter, study participants could engage in regular social interaction with other residents and staff. However, numerous constraints as described in the previous section prevented them from making use of this resource for this purpose. It was, precisely, because they were not engaging in substantial social interaction amongst each other while at the emergency accommodation that administrators welcomed the opportunity to engage me as a volunteer to promote a greater sense of community among residents.

Another available institutional resource were local trade unions, which support international migrants by allowing free access to vocational training in different trades to facilitate their integration into the job market. Involvement in these short-term trainings affords participants from different backgrounds opportunities to expand their social connections. However, findings indicated that only a few residents sought this support, as most were too concerned about finding immediate income to invest their time in training. Many participants had still not developed sufficient fluency in the local languages to benefit from this type of training anyway.

It was, quite likely, for these same reasons that only a few were willing to explore the district-based job centre and even those did not return a second time. Most of the available job vacancies required some qualifications, local language and job interviewing skills, which they did not have and did not prioritise at this point.

Scarcely available social resources in one's social environment, combined with the fact that a majority of study participants were almost exclusively focused on finding immediate jobs, may have deprived study participants from opportunities for social engagement even though, as Ungar (2011) states, they might have the required personal assets to catalyse social relationship.

### 6.2.3. Distal (community-based) meso-level social resources



According to Ungar, (2011) resilience is more likely to occur in social environments where individuals caught in adverse circumstances can find a wide range of accessible community-based social resources required to satisfy different needs. Hagan (2008) and Levit, (2007), as discussed by Flores-Yeffal (2013) highlight the need that many international migrants manifest to find spiritual

reassurance in the midst of doubt and uncertainty. For this reason, they prioritise regular connection with their churches or mosques where they can reaffirm their religious beliefs and find solace from like-minded individuals. Regular attendance to nearby churches or mosques was, indeed, an absolute priority for all participants in this study. Aside from the opportunity these connections offered to reaffirm their faith that their destiny was in God's hands, many also reported that they valued the opportunity to receive counsel from their pastors or imams and gather with like-minded individuals who were sensitive to their experiences.

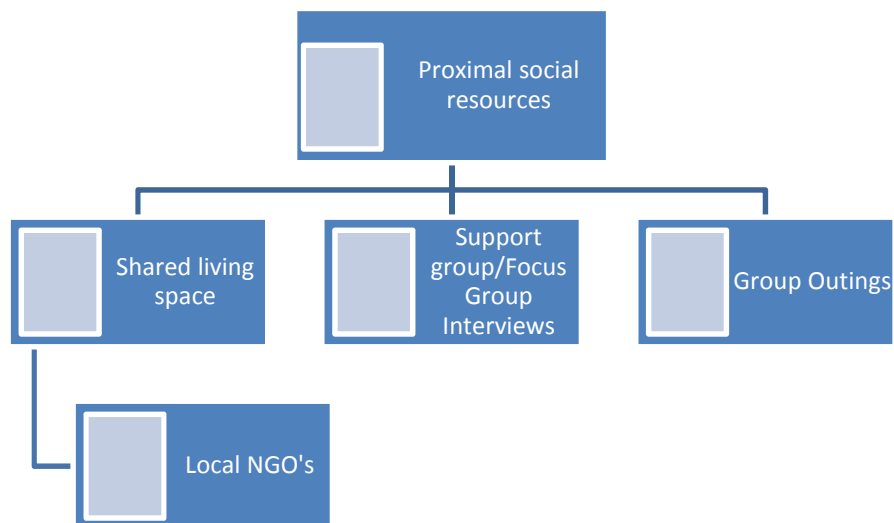
Cyber centres, often operated by migrants, figure as another popular venue for international migrants as they are able to meet with other migrants and locals while making international calls, sending remittances to their families and browsing the internet. Study participants made frequent use of local cyber centres at least until they could no longer afford services provided after becoming destitute. During the fieldwork, they showed greater interest in the mini-laptop provided at the emergency accommodation, as they could use it free of charge. They otherwise had less need for cyber centres as they had no money to neither pay for international calls nor send remittances to their families. This resource, therefore, ceased to function as a meeting point for them.

Other potentially relevant meso-level, community-based resources identified in related literature on undocumented migrants (Flores-Yeffal, 2013) include national associations from countries international migrants come from, for opportunities these associations might offer to take part in cultural celebrations and meet other countrymen or locals; activity clubs, with special emphasis on sports clubs for young international migrants who have a particular interest in certain sports, like football; and advocacy platforms, which bring both migrants and locals together in a

collaborative effort to reform unfair government policies towards undocumented migrants.

Although these resources existed in study participants' social environment, they maintained a distant relationship with them. They did not feel represented by their countries' national association and could not pay regular membership fees. Several participants had established links with local football clubs but were unable to maintain these links as they also required a membership fee they could not afford at the present time. Most were reluctant to participate in local advocacy platforms out of concern that they might be identified by immigration authorities while taking part in demonstrations, arrested and deported.

#### **6.2.4. Proximal (emergency accommodation-based) meso-level social resources**



Ungar (2011) refers to feelings of trust as an important component of social capital, which promotes recovery by acting as an effective buffer against the impact of stress. Findings support the view held in the reviewed literature on undocumented migrants that trust was, indeed, a sensitive topic for study participants. Findings also

indicated that study participants had few social resources in their immediate surroundings they could rely upon to build trust. The obvious meso-level social resource they had regular contact with and which could foster trust among them was the emergency accommodation where they were residing during fieldwork for this research. In this shared living space, they could find, as authors Simich, Beiser, and Mawani (2003) state, people with similar cultural backgrounds who had faced similar experiences and challenges throughout their migration trajectories, which facilitates the establishment of trust. However, findings show that study participants were generally reluctant to take advantage of this space to engage in substantial social interaction amongst them. These findings support the view held by Bellah et al. (1985) and Selznick, (1992), as cited in Flores-Yeffal (2013), that the context in which individuals interact is an important consideration when trying to understand their attitudes towards cooperation.

In line with resilience theory, when external resources required for resilience are scarce or inadequate, it is advisable to create new ones or make necessary adjustments to existing ones. The emergency accommodation was unable to serve as a space to foster trust amongst residents as the migrant support association had limited resources to mediate social linkage between residents and between residents and external social resources. Findings indicated that this association had only been able to involve the local NGO Education without Borders to provide Spanish/Catalan tutoring support for residents. This was the reason why administrators stressed the importance of developing a dual researcher-volunteer support staff role, in the expectation that this role would serve to build additional supports required by residents. The weekly support group, focus group interviews and group outings that were launched in the context of this research were a response to this felt priority.



Although findings indicate that study participants did not resist the logic behind these new initiatives, and, in fact, PTS results show that they all highly valued social relationships and preferred to be part of a group, in acknowledgement of the need for some degree of cooperation, not all responded to these initiatives in equal manner. Veale (2010) found that even when supports are available, some people seem to have more difficulties than others in terms of accessing them and making effective use of them, for a variety of different reasons. Observed differences lead this author to formulate the concept of resilience as an emerging property of the systems lying within and between individuals, which resonates with Ungar's (2008) view of resilience as the capacity to navigate one's way to health sustaining resources.

Both these formulations build on the notion of protective factors espoused in Prevention Science (Coie et al. 1993) that acknowledges that the impact of risk factors on individuals varies in intensity and duration depending on the continuous interaction between available intra-individual and external resources that can potentially modify risks in positive ways. The next section of this chapter, therefore, reflects upon the intra-individual social assets that some study participants seemed to mobilise while using macro and meso-level resources identified during fieldwork.

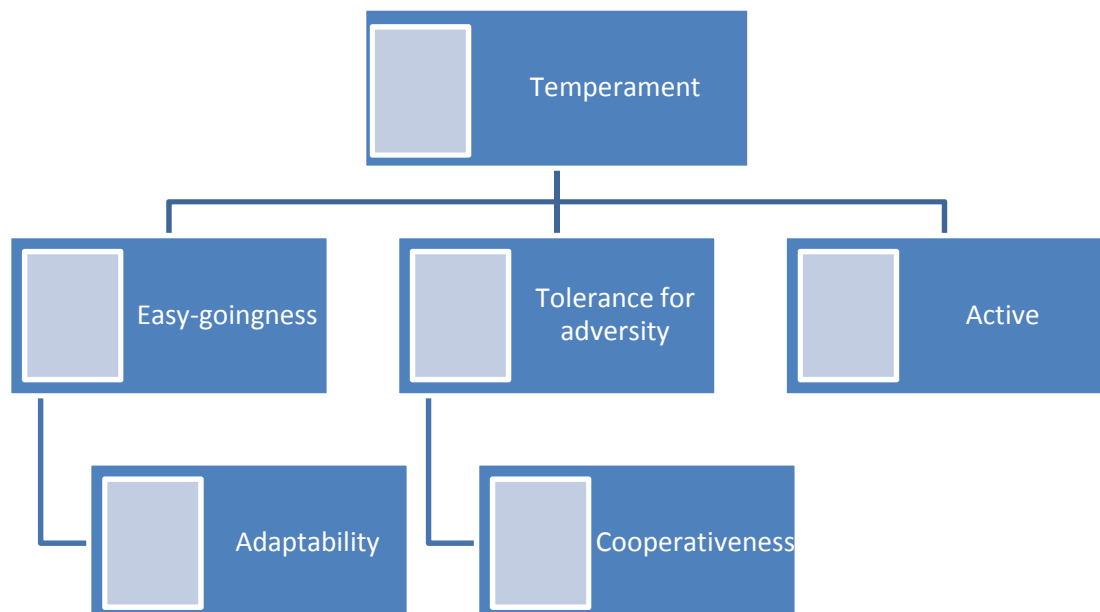
## **6.4. Conclusion**

### **6.4.1. Intra-individual social assets**

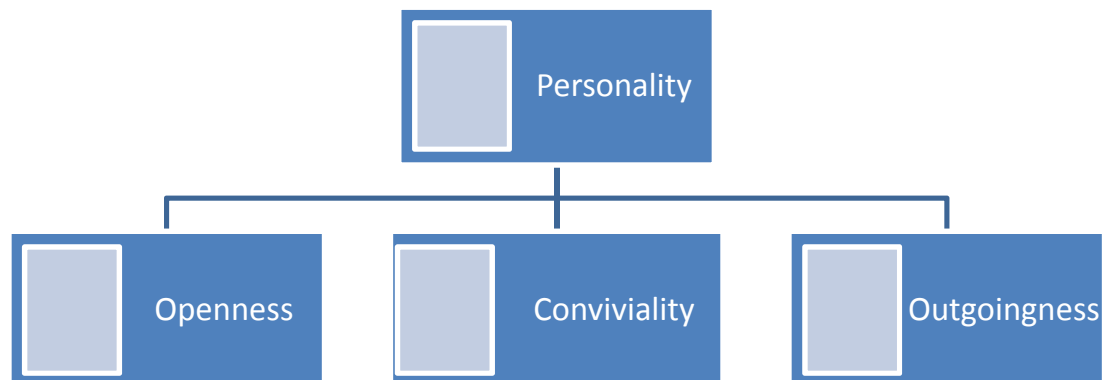
At intra-individual level, Ungar (2011) articulates temperament, personality and cognitions as important promotive and protective factors related to resilience. These personal features constitute what is commonly referred to as individual capacity or self-agency, which allows people caught in adversity to engage in processes of continuous negotiation with available resources in their social environment. By

negotiation, what can be understood, more specifically, is the process by which individuals are able to use their accumulated individual assets to effectively link up with appropriate resources in their life environments. Both systems (Veale, 2010) are critical to ensure resilience. According to Ungar, (2011) if either of these dimensions are weak, it will not allow individuals to buffer pressure deriving from accumulated risks. A social environment may provide adequate supports but individuals may lack intrapersonal resources required to link up with them. Conversely, individuals may have the required assets to establish social links but lack adequate resources in their life settings to link up to. In either case, the likely outcome is that individuals will display poor engagement.

This research found evidence of a series of social assets that were reflected in the use that some study participants made of available resources in their social environment. The noted personal characteristics fall broadly under the promotive and protective factors related to resilience as defined by Ungar (2011) and will be discussed in that order.

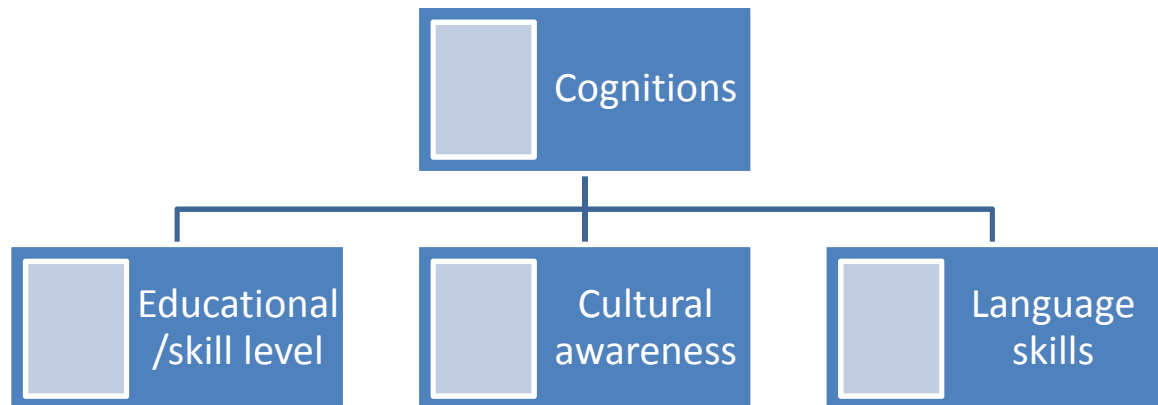


Temperament related features noted in this research that seemed to enable social connection in this social environment included easy-goingness and adaptability in relation to others, as reflected in some study participants' general pleasant mood and capacity to get along with others regardless of ethnic affiliation, unlike some who appeared slow to warm up to others and lost in their thoughts. These study participants appeared consistently approachable unlike others who appeared to be keeping safe distances with others. They seemed to go with the flow of events in their life, with confidence that they would eventually overcome adversity as their life was in God's hands. They remained active in search of solutions, as reflected in the fact that they rarely stayed at the emergency accommodation after lunch. Others appeared far more passive. A final temperament related feature displayed by some study participants was their willingness to freely contribute whatever knowledge and skills they had to respond to others' requests for assistance.

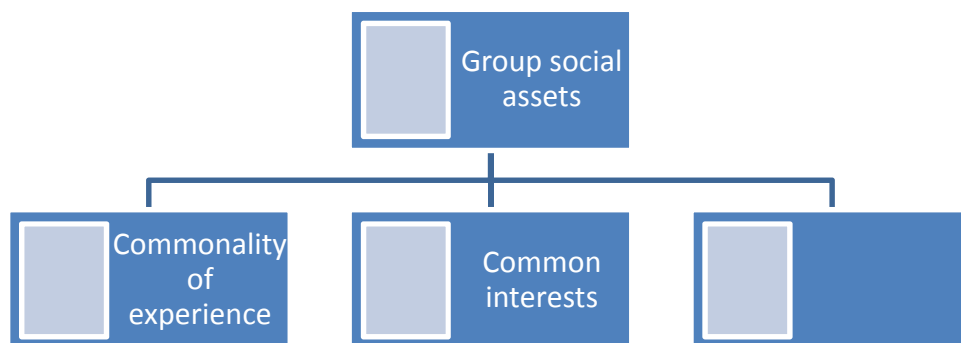


Noteworthy personality features displayed by some study participants that seemed to be particularly useful to establish social links included openness, as reflected in their willingness to learn new skills, expand their cultural awareness, and participate in group activities; conviviality, as shown by their natural disposition to

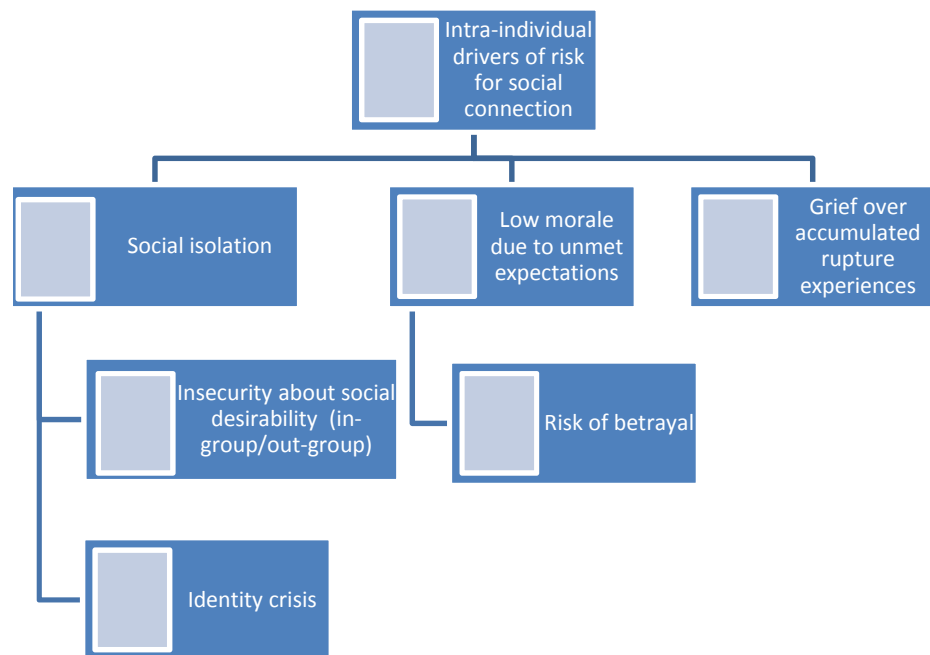
put those around them at ease and avoid conflictive situations at the emergency accommodation; and outgoingness, as reflected in their knowledge of all residents and the ease in which they started conversations with others.



#### 6.4.2. Group social assets



### 6.4.3. Micro level risk factors



The networks in which undocumented migrants participate adopt particular modes of functioning in order to address the specific concerns of its members. A basic and quite evident concern that all undocumented migrants have is to avoid risk of arrest and deportation. A basic function of undocumented migrant networks is, therefore, to effectively limit members' exposure to this kind of risk. All participants in the network must devote their personal efforts towards achieving the highest degree of safety for the entire network. Any betrayal could jeopardise the safety of the entire network. Network members must, therefore, trust each other enough to comply with this basic expectation in order for the network to maintain itself; they must be consistently trustworthy and also expect other members to be equally trustworthy. Flores-Yeffal (2013), citing Tilly (2007), points out that social relationships among undocumented migrants are fundamentally governed by trust owing to this basic concern. They need to be able to draw on reliable sources of information in order to reduce risk of being caught, jailed and deported by immigration authorities.

Since trust among network members is so important to preserve a sense of general safety, it is not surprising that most migrants form connections with others with whom they share common background characteristics. This helps them to make networks where members feel they can rely on each other. As has been noted in the literature, network members usually come from the same country and in many cases already knew each other before migrating internationally. They speak the same native language, have similar economic levels, migratory experiences and life aspirations. This level of homogeneity is highly valued by all network members as a way to minimise risk of exposure to arrest and deportation. Most significantly to this research is the observation that network members can trust each other to address their basic concerns in the transnational context insofar as they basically share the same sense of social obligation towards each other, based on culturally-bound norms of reciprocal solidarity (Flores-Yeffal 2013).

Based on this finding, it is understandable that certain undocumented migrants might feel less capable of relating to others with whom they don't share common background characteristics, as they would the necessary basis for trust. It would otherwise cause them to leave their usual comfort zone and, perhaps, expose them to increased risk of arrest and deportation. Although a certain level of homogeneity among study participants was noted, (like origin in Africa, age range, similar economic and educational level, similar migration goals) there was also a considerable degree of heterogeneity along tribal, religious, and linguistic lines. They were all also caught in an extremely precarious life situation, which heightens risk of betrayal as each is looking out for personal interest.

Based on this analysis, it was clear that applying a "trust" lens to reveal critical aspects influencing study participants' capacity to trust in this particular life setting could help to explain the observed variation in social connectivity among study

participants. The next section, therefore, explores in more detail the basic elements on which trust between network members is founded, in order to then show how study participants' new context of relationship at the emergency accommodation could represent a challenge to form trust in relationships according to their usual expectations.

#### **6.4.1. Trust in undocumented migrant networks**

As mentioned earlier on in this thesis, the large majority of undocumented migrants that formed part of this study were originally from agrarian or fishing communities in rural parts of their respective countries. Although some had lived in larger inland urban areas before initiating their transnational migration journey, others went directly from their small towns or villages to major cities on mainland Spain. This part of the discussion focuses its attention on culturally-bound social dynamics in less developed rural communities that continue to operate in the transnational context, as still largely non acculturated undocumented migrants couldn't be expected to have adopted different ways of relating to others.

Undocumented migrants originating in rural African communities often come from cultural environments that have been historically exposed to situations of shortage, even extreme shortage. In these kinds of environments, community members are naturally led to develop shared systems of support involving the entire community. These shared support systems help community members build a collective conscience that ensures social cohesiveness in the face of adversity. The constant exchange of favours among community members has become the traditional means by which community members address their needs in these rural settings. Different authors refer to this characteristic social dynamic in different ways, e.g. reciprocal solidarity (Flores-Yeffal, 2013); bounded solidarity (Portes and Sensenbrenner 2003); or mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). Deviation from the

norm subjects individuals to the community's rejection and punishment as it is perceived as a disloyalty to the group's welfare.

Individuals caught in difficult life circumstances can, therefore, trust that community members will at least try to fulfil their social obligation to support others with whom they share common characteristics. Undocumented migrants from these countries of origin naturally hold these expectations more intensely in the transnational context as they confront extremely difficult life circumstances and multiple risks with which they are unfamiliar. It is observed (and confirmed by the data in this study) that, in order to meet these expectations, undocumented migrants usually integrate into networks whose members have plenty in common and might have even known each other before migrating internationally. This precaution ensures that all network members will engage in reciprocal solidarity as essential to establish trust. The network draws on culturally-bound systems of social control to ensure each member's compliance with expectations (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 2003) as cited in Flores-Yeffal, (2013).

Based on these expectations, several authors have pointed out that a characteristic feature of undocumented migrant social networks is the fact that they become rather exclusive units and difficult to access. Within these closed circles, participants develop strong ties over lengthy periods, which strengthen trust among network members. However, while evolving within these limited social circles, they also have scarce if any meaningful contact with members from other ethnic communities. Citing Tilly (2007), Flores-Yeffal states that "the operation of migrants' trust network creates and depends on boundaries that separate members from outsiders". Outsiders are not easily trusted by comparison with network members but can be eventually admitted into the network if they follow the same social and behavioural expectations on trustworthiness.



Several additional authors referenced by Flores-Yeffal, like Nee and Sanders, 2001; Granovetter, 1973; Wasserman and Faust, 1994, have highlighted additional disadvantages of belonging to undocumented migrant networks. For example, undocumented migrants have a harder time to develop proficiency in the local languages, since network members speak their native language, and the menial jobs they hold do not usually require extensive use of local languages. These jobs keep them busy for most of the day anyway, so many feel too tired at the end of the day to take language lessons. Lack of language skills deprives them of an essential resource to engage with the wider context. Another important disadvantage is that while sharing cultural norms and practices with like-ethnic social contacts, undocumented migrants are not exposed to the rules and laws of the reception country, which prevents them from knowing their civil or labour rights.

#### **6.4.2. Social distance between ethnic groups**

In light of undocumented migrants' particularly cautious approach to trusting others in social relationships it is understandable that some of the participants in this study appeared to avoid mixing with others. From this standpoint, their social responses appear to be influenced by their uncertainties in regard to the possibility of trusting others with whom they didn't have a history of relationships. They could have had some superficial contact with each other in the past but certainly not to the degree of being able to rely on each other for meaningful support. The fluidity of the situation and resulting unsettled feelings they were all experiencing while living at the emergency accommodation certainly didn't encourage them to explore this possibility either.

#### **6.4.3. Low morale**

A proportion of study participants displayed low morale. This could be associated with having to endure yet another undesired shift in their life

circumstances at this stage of their migratory experience. However, this could also be associated with anxiety about not being able to sustain relationships over the longer term with individuals they could rightfully expect to receive some support from. It appeared that peer contacts had been particularly useful to relieve tensions at difficult junctures, as necessary to maintain basic trust. Under these particular circumstances, many didn't have anybody they felt sufficiently at ease with to confide in, and, therefore, no way to release their tension, which could further undermine morale. They could be wondering who outside of their established network would even take that much interest in them.

#### **6.4.4. Breakdown of reciprocal solidarity**

As Flores Yeffal, (2013) suggests, within undocumented migrant groups 'trust' is only possible because network members are equally committed to the value of reciprocal solidarity. In order to engage in relationships of mutual solidarity, network members must be able to, at least, foresee the possibility of offering something in exchange for what they might need from others. In a situation where study participants felt they barely had sufficient means to support themselves, they felt unable to live up to mutual expectations of support. Instead, they were more inclined to focus on their own particular needs in order to survive. The perceived difficulty to engage in relationships based on the principle of reciprocal solidarity - while caught in this situation - deprived study participants of an essential social mechanism to generate sufficient trust as required to stimulate social connection. It was therefore more likely that, in these circumstances, affected individuals felt in competition with each other for scarce resources and less inclined to cooperate with each other.

#### **6.4.5. Impact of destitution**

Their destitute condition was clearly a trust constraining factor in other important respects. Destitution had the effect of lowering their confidence about being equally

valued by new social contacts; some were convinced that even if they tried to form new social relationships, others would eventually find out about their destitute condition and this would create distances between them. Study participants were already sensitive to stigmatisation from the local population and felt there was increased risk of being stigmatised in this impoverished state. The only people they might be able to relate to more easily under these circumstances would be people that were found in similar condition as their own but, in this case, they might also be taken advantage of in some way. These are ambiguous situations, which might cause some to develop a heightened sensitivity in regard to others' perceptions and attitudes towards them. It appeared that they would rather remain aloof and watchful in order to avoid a sense of ridicule and suffer further humiliation or exploitation.

#### **6.4.6. Negative social pressure**

The economic crisis inevitably exacerbated pre-existing negative perceptions held by certain segments of the local population regarding the rate of ongoing migration to Spain from certain areas of the world. Since study participants had lost their established peer contacts, which served as reference to make sense of the reality they were living in the transnational context, they now lacked those valuable filters to put this increased hostility towards migrants into better perspective. Anne Reitz (2013) investigates the causes of differences in adaptation among immigrant youth. One of her major findings is that positive relationships with both other immigrants and natives are important for successful adaptation: one enhances self-esteem, whereas the other weakens the feeling of being discriminated against. Some undocumented migrants that took part in this study appeared to not have established positive relationships with people outside of their usual networks, and, therefore, lacked the necessary safeguards to protect themselves against increased expressions of hostility towards migrants from certain countries.

In situations like these, individuals may become suspicious of others' intentions, perhaps even more so of those closest to them, out of fear of betrayal. Study participants' intergroup relations hadn't necessarily been positive ones while crossing multiple transit countries throughout their migratory journey, where they had to deal with thieves, exploitative bosses, aggressive border guards, and discrimination. They had also shared space in detention centres, which are typically fertile grounds for conflicts between members of different ethnic groups. As expressed by several study participants in the context of group meetings and later confirmed in responses to the PTS, most were convinced that other people would do anything to get ahead in life. These are tensions that are not conducive to elicit trust as required to maintain openness towards others.

#### **6.4.7. Safe ethnic group boundaries**

Another consideration in regards to the need to be open towards others is that, study participants were used to evolving within safe boundaries established by the small social networks they belonged to. Even though there was a certain degree of homogeneity among study participants, as explained earlier, there was also a significant degree of heterogeneity among them based on diverse tribal and religious affiliation, experience in context and educational level. From this perspective, it becomes understandable that study participants didn't find sufficient unifying factors within the newly formed group to warrant the same level of social obligation as they felt towards network members. A desire to keep pre-existing safe boundaries between ethnic groups intact could, therefore, be another impediment towards social connection.

#### **6.4.8. Effects of idleness**

Due to study participants' circumspection about relating to others they wouldn't relate to under normal circumstances, they either had to form alternative friendships

outside of the emergency accommodation or else rely on staff for different support needs. It appeared that those who didn't have any contacts outside of the flat stayed inside most of the time. They also appeared more dependent on staff. Prolonged inactivity may result in less self-confidence, which, in turn, affects social connection.

#### **6.4.9. Decreased sense of community**

As noted by different authors writing on sense of community, (Sarason, S. 1974; McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Trickett, E. 2009) scarce social contact over an extended period and consequent weakened sense of community and belonging may also cause some individuals to become less trusting of others. While socially isolated, migrants may feel driven to cope with their feelings of loneliness by overemphasising their cultural identity as a means of strengthening their sense of belonging, and, in parallel, devalue the culture in which they are having trouble integrating into. Several study participants made it clear that they were quite disappointed with Spain and would prefer to live in other European countries. They felt there was a lot of racism in Catalonia towards African migrants. This cultural distancing leads to rigidified social positions, rendering social intercourse more difficult. It is sufficient for some influential peers to adopt this more rigid position for others to react in similar fashion, out of fear of being out of line and, consequently, stigmatised by the peer group.

#### **6.4.10. Trust and religion**

Although study participants considered that their religious faith was a meaningful source of support in their lives at this time, and religions are known to embrace a set of values that facilitate social connection, in this particular situation, it seemed like religious faith could have the inverse effect for some. It seemed to provide an example of overemphasis on one's cultural identity in order to strengthen sense of community and belonging. Several study participants indicated that no one else

deserved trust but God and, therefore, there was no point in attempting social connections where one's trust might be betrayed. They framed their current experience in terms of a life trial that was intended to make them focus their attention on their relationship with God and strengthen trust in Him. Therefore, at this moment, it seemed like any other worldly relationship mattered far less. Only by focusing on their relationship with God, and this applied to both Christians and Muslims alike, could they expect to eventually get through this trial and move on in life.

#### **6.4.11. Help seeking behaviour**

With respect to accessing support provided by community-based resources, this particular social process could also be rather intimidating for study participants on the grounds of their culturally-influenced, help-seeking behaviour. Traditionally, as has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, members from rural communities in African contexts are able to draw support provided by the community in times of need. In this situation, they had to instead know which community services provided specific supports and on the basis of which criteria and where these services were located. Most had insufficient awareness of available resources at community level, let alone their criteria for admission. To establish these kinds of links would also imply communicating their needs in a language many were still not entirely familiar with, which could discourage them from going in that direction. The fact that undocumented migrants are also well aware of local perceptions in the sense that many migrants come to live off the country's generous welfare system, which then strains the local economy, certainly didn't encourage them to explore these alternative support options.

Study participants faced grim prospects of being able to stabilise their situation in the short-term as the economic situation continued to show no signs of

improvement. It is therefore understandable that some appeared to have become rather pessimistic about the sustainability of their migratory project. Several expressed a desire to return to home country, even after their painstaking efforts to reach Europe by sea on fragile dinghies and spending time in migrant detention centres. The pressure had become, indeed, unbearable for some against all expectation, as they had nothing to look forward to. Nothing to assure them that life would take a more positive course in the near or distant future. As pointed out by several different authors writing on trust, (Uslaner, 2002) the capacity to trust is closely associated with optimism regarding one's chances to effect positive changes. One could, therefore, surmise that some study participants' pessimistic outlooks undermined trust and hindered their dispositional willingness to engage in social relationships.

Faced with these complexities, the only way study participants could maintain social connection in this situation was by making adjustments in their trust expectations to enable them to cross established boundaries between ethnic groups. Few appeared to be inclined in this sense. By all appearances, they lacked this experience, as indicated by their scarce if any contacts with members from different ethnic groups than their own.

## **Chapter 7 – Conclusions**

### **7.1. Summary**

As previously pointed out, undocumented migrants from African countries must proceed very cautiously while navigating their way through the settlement process in Spain. They know that because of their lack of legal resident permits, they can be arrested and deported at any moment by immigration authorities. This threat causes them to become highly suspicious of others, especially since the unwelcoming attitudes shown by members of the autochthonous population make them believe that anyone could be willing to assist immigration authorities to expel them. Suspicion may even extend to other international migrants as they know that many are experiencing similar settlement difficulties and might betray them for their own personal advantage. They are also aware of the risk of being manipulated and exploited by people who perceive their vulnerability.

For the fact that undocumented migrants of African origin perceive a high level of risk surrounding social relationship in the transnational context, they go to considerable lengths to minimise exposure. Findings in this research indicate that in order to cope with their concerns around safety, members of these social groups gravitate to available undocumented migrant networks, the majority of whose members belong to the same country of origin, as within these circles they are able to draw upon shared, culturally-based resources, like reciprocal solidarity, that provide a basis for trust in the face of risk. However, as also pointed out by various authors cited in this research, these networks are also known to be inherently fragile, as their maintenance depends largely on the availability of jobs – consistently unemployed network members are not able to maintain reciprocal solidarity. From this perspective, it becomes understandable that the 2008 global



economic crisis and its devastating effects on the Spanish economy triggered the erosion of many undocumented migrant networks, as a result of which many members of these social groups were left stranded.

In consideration of the importance it has for undocumented migrants to belong to a social network in the transnational context, the thesis explored the reasons behind observed differences in study participants' attitudes towards social engagement after losing contact with their available social networks. Insight gained regarding the importance of maintaining reciprocal solidarity within undocumented migrant social networks as a means of heightening trust among its members suggests that some study participants' displayed apathy to connect with others in this changed social environment might be associated to difficulties to restore reciprocal solidarity in their social relationships after becoming destitute. The basic question one could ask could be: through which alternative pathway could study participants become confident that others could be trusted to uphold their safety? There are no possible trade-offs on safety for undocumented migrants facing risk of arrest and deportation.

The thesis reaches the conclusion that, faced with the difficulty to articulate culturally-based resources, like reciprocal solidarity, that enable trust and social connection once they lost contact with their available social networks and became destitute, coupled with study participants' natural reluctance to reach out to community-based supports, especially in an increasingly hostile social environment due to the economic recession, study participants' capacity to maintain social connection depended most importantly on available individual resources that mediate social connection. The question could, therefore, be: what kinds of internal resources acted in substitution of unavailable culturally-based resources to enable certain study participants to maintain continued trust and social connection in this difficult social environment? An important finding of this research is that those study

participants who maintained a cooperative attitude irrespective of cultural and religious differences were those that showed the highest level of social engagement.

A dispositional willingness to cooperate in small and bigger ways creates the necessary conditions of trust that enhance social connections. Individuals that show a marked orientation towards cooperation generally hold positive perceptions and attitudes towards others. They are able to switch flexibly between cultures and refuse black and white thinking. They do not entertain stereotypical thinking or diabolise others, blaming them for everything that has gone wrong. As cooperative individuals feel supported by others they come into contact with, they feel encouraged by a sense that someone cares, and, therefore, find it easier to maintain an optimistic outlook that helps maintain and expand trust. Those who are less flexible in their social relationships may become more socially distant owing to difficulties to adjust their demands when required by adverse life circumstances. They may then grow increasingly distrustful as they lack channels to alleviate their accumulated fears and uncertainty.

## **7.2. Implications of findings for policy and practice in migrant support**

From the previous discussion, it becomes clear that those study participants who maintained an open attitude towards cooperation with nearby others, with no apparent ethnic or religious bias, were those that remained socially connected despite adverse life circumstances. They were able to bridge social contact as their stronger inclination towards cooperation prevailed over any other consideration regarding traditional trust requirements. In this way, they were able to preserve a minimum sense of integration. This finding has implications for policy and practice in migrant support. Reference to Ager and Strang's (2008) integration framework can be useful to conceptualise the ways in which undocumented migrant supporters can

appropriately enhance opportunities for cooperation among members of these groups in order to promote their integration.

The cited integration framework underscores the importance of accessing a number of facilitators through which newly arrived refugees can establish social links at different levels through which they can more easily achieve certain markers of integration. A pre-condition to access these facilitators is to be granted basic rights to access essential community resources, which are normally accorded to refugees in asylum countries. However, when the same framework is applied to undocumented migrants in Spain, it becomes clear that because this category of migrants is denied right of entry into Spanish territory by governmental policy, they are prevented from accessing available facilitators of broader social connection and, therefore, only have recourse to undocumented migrant social networks for necessary social connections.

These types of networks are unable to leverage members' access to markers of integration since they generally function as self-contained, protected enclaves, with minimal if any contact with the wider context, which prevents members from forming necessary social links with locals and with available systems. Undocumented migrants are otherwise unable to dedicate time to learn the local language and increase their cultural awareness, which are identified facilitators of social linkage in the referenced framework, as they are normally obliged to work in underpaid jobs for long hours to send remittances to their families. Since their social life revolves mostly around network members from same country of origin, who speak the same native language, they neither feel the need to access these kinds of facilitators. Whatever amount of safety and stability these networks can provide, as other defined facilitators of integration, it is clearly not to the degree that would help them establish broader social contacts.

Migrant supporters can, therefore, enhance undocumented migrant integration by creating opportunities for cooperation among undocumented migrants and between members of these social groups and the wider society with the aim of improving access to necessary facilitators of social linkage. Promotion of the idea of sharing responsibility to address common concerns within these social groups can result in what Ungar (2011) might refer to as successful community processes that help build interpersonal trust. This type of intervention falls in line with the general recommendation to operate positive changes in undocumented migrants' social ecology, which, as defined by the Psychosocial Working Group framework, (Strang and Ager, 2004) is a key dimension of psychosocial wellbeing.

The key questions the answers to which might help migrant supporters set in motion a dynamic of cooperation among undocumented migrants could be:

- How can we work together to ensure adequate access to facilitators that enable broader social connections and, by extension, greater integration?
- Which new resources need to be developed in the community through a participatory process to help undocumented migrants diversify their social contacts?

Migrant supporters would need to continually stress the importance of diversifying social contacts and recognising available facilitators of wider social contact in context in order to achieve integration, as necessary to stimulate interest in cooperation among those undocumented migrants who may feel more reluctant to engage in social contact outside of their established social networks.

To support undocumented migrants by improving their access to facilitators of social linkage could be considered an integral component of social inclusion work. The ultimate aim of social inclusion, from a social justice perspective, is to enhance

sustainable human development by facilitating previously marginalised individuals' access to their basic human rights (markers of integration). Through free exercise of their rights, previously deprived individuals can experience the dignity that derives from both increased autonomy, self-efficacy and supportive social ties that provide a sense of community and belongingness. The enjoyment of rights by larger segments of the population then provides spaces for encounter and dialogue that foster a cohesive social environment in which individuals can attain and maintain an adequate level of health and wellbeing; these are the indispensable pre-conditions for sustainable human development and resilience in crisis situations.

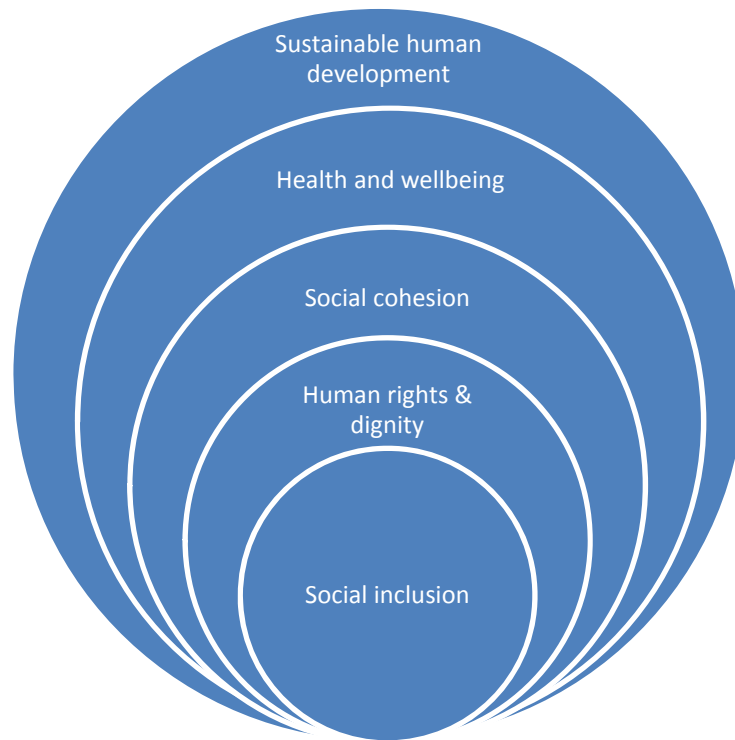
However, this virtuous cycle of health and wellbeing can be disrupted by strong exclusionary currents that prevent individuals from forming a wide range of social connections that can provide crucial support in their quest for their rights, like those observed in European contexts in relation to undocumented migrants from developing countries. In a vacuum of social support, individuals are exposed to increased risk of abuse, exploitation and victimisation, which creates further social distance. The only way of narrowing this gap is by promoting the broadest cooperative effort possible between undocumented migrants and members of the autochthonous population to enable access to facilitators of social linkage. Therefore, social inclusion work with undocumented migrants must, essentially, include fostering cooperative partnerships that leverage access and continued use of available facilitators of wider social linkage.

Cooperative partnerships can focus on addressing factors lying at different levels that prevent linkage with facilitators of social connections. At a macro level, they can focus on addressing restrictive governmental policies that prevent access to the territory and on cultural barriers that prevent undocumented migrants from mixing with locals. At a meso level, they can address the need to adapt available

community resources through which undocumented migrants can access facilitators of social links. At a micro level, partnerships can serve to develop undocumented migrant capacities that facilitate social links at different levels. However, as noted by Veale, A. (2010) in reference to people caught in adversity, some undocumented migrants may be reluctant to engage in cooperative efforts even when this type of support is within reach.

As highlighted throughout the thesis, undocumented migrants have particular trust requirements given their level of risk exposure. Many may, consequently, not take easily to cooperative initiatives intended to diversify their social networks unless they feel a high level of trust. As long as they cannot feel completely reassured of the community's understanding and acceptance, fear of further rejection and stigmatisation remains strong. To remain in their protected enclaves is far safer. In order to build trust among those that feel more reluctant, it, therefore, appears necessary to create proximal resources that mediate linkage with more commonly used facilitators of social linkage.

It is at this point where an understanding of the social mechanisms that embody trust within specific social groups can prove useful. The question that migrant supporters can formulate in this respect could be: Which social mechanisms do people belonging to different social groups, including those belonging to the majority group in the reception country, employ to ensure trust in their social relationships? Proximal resources can then be conceived to embody these social mechanisms so as to foster trust among socially withdrawn undocumented migrants.



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#### **7.2.1. Avenues of future research**

With a focus on improving access to human rights among undocumented migrants, in order to build a cohesive social environment that is conducive to health and sustainable development, research efforts can be geared towards gaining a greater understanding of context-specific facilitators that enhance social connectivity, as well as of major factors that enhance or hinder access to identified facilitators. In light of the need for proximal resources that are specifically adapted to those undocumented migrants that are highly reluctant to form cooperative ties, research efforts can also focus on understanding the social mechanisms, both in country of origin and of migrant destination, that allow trust to flourish in social relationships. Recommendations deriving from research findings can then propose strategies to ensure undocumented migrant linkage with the specific types of facilitators they require to access their human rights.

### **7.3. Researcher reflexivity**

In line with ethical principles espoused by the social-ecological paradigm of community psychology that guides this study, this section discusses potential researcher biases in the interpretation of phenomena, as well as potential researcher influences on the findings of this research, especially in consideration of my dual researcher/supporter role at the emergency accommodation.

One consideration is that while I may have focused attention on objectively verifiable barriers to social connection in study participants' current life setting, and interpreted their varied social responses in terms of their individual capacity to deal with the emotional impacts of these barriers, these factors may not have been those that each study participant considered most relevant. They may have valued other factors that would be considered more relevant to social interaction in their particular culture and present contextual configuration. However, since they were not eager to extend themselves on intimate subjects, it would have been hard to reach alternative definitions. Faced with scarce self-disclosure, as their personal circumstances imposed, it was necessary to lay out a wide range of potentially adverse factors and assume that one or several, in isolation or in combination, were important in the lives of study participants at this time.

It could have been valuable to explore how study participants interacted with non-residents in the community to note any possible variation with regards to their in-house social behaviour. However, to follow each study participant in the community to gain a glimpse of their community-based social interactions was unrealistic in the context of this research. To suggest that possibility with study participants would have likely raised further suspicion. Their reluctance to seek much contact with an easily accessible support staff member during this difficult



period in their lives was indicative that they would be equally disinclined to do so outside of the emergency accommodation with anybody else.

It became apparent that while some study participants engaged with me on a fairly regular basis, others did so more occasionally and some seemed to mainly identify me as the person to who direct all their complaints. Those who engaged with me in this fashion were consistently those who appeared to not mix much with others either. However, given the particular characteristics of the setting in which I met with them on a daily basis and my connection to the administrative level of the emergency accommodation, some may have, in fact, felt less free to communicate with me and more at ease communicating with outsiders. It all depended on their personal perception of risk, which study participants preferred to not reveal. Therefore, it was not entirely certain that those who communicated less with me were more withdrawn in a general sense.

Another area of self-reflection concerned my own power to conduct the research along ethical lines in a context where I had no executive power. There were some challenges associated with working alongside administrative staff members that did have the decision-making power over everything that happened at the emergency accommodation. They needed to show a high level of control in order to establish safe boundaries among residents at the emergency accommodation. A noted challenge in this regard concerned the characteristic manner in which administrative staff approached residents to involve them in research-related activities they considered appropriate to improve cohabitation among residents. From my personal perspective, it was important to safeguard study participants' full autonomy to participate, not only because it was ethically rigorous but also to observe how they freely interacted (or not) with proposed group

activities. Administrative staff members, however, felt heavily inclined to make participation in any proposed research activity mandatory.

The proposal to start a weekly support group for all residents provides an illustrative example of these differing approaches. While I did not wish to make attendance mandatory, administrative staff decided otherwise, in view of its potential benefit to build group cohesion. I was left with the question about freedom to implement research procedures according to recommended ethical standards in a highly structured environment where I was an invited outsider. Those residents who may not have been interested in attending this particular meeting could have, understandably, felt coerced to participate.

With regards to the possibility of involving at least some residents in collaborative efforts to conceive, design, and implement certain components of this research, in line with my initial expectations, a major challenge encountered concerned the temporariness of participants' stay at the emergency accommodation; they could be there one day and gone the next depending on alternative arrangements they might find and, therefore, couldn't be expected to maintain regular involvement in research-related tasks. For individual residents to form collaborative links with an outsider (the researcher) would likely also raise suspicion among their peers and, therefore, only peer leaders might have been able to take advantage of this opportunity for collaboration; peer leaders, nevertheless, primarily exerted their influence on same-ethnic flatmates and not necessarily on the entire group of residents, which was ethnically diverse.

Given these noted constraints, better outcomes for residents through their involvement in this research were sought by providing them with increased opportunities for participation in activities that responded to their personal interests.

The organisation of the weekly support group meeting, focus group interviews on “hot topics”, and weekend social outings was intended for this purpose as well, as these activities provided residents with the opportunity to gather useful information, communicate their concerns, elicit necessary support, and increase their contextual awareness.

A final point of reflection concerned the potential for respondent *reactivity*, referring, as Padgett, D. (1998) states, to the potential that the researcher’s presence in the field might distort the naturalism of the setting and, consequently, the things being observed there, thus, compromising the validity of the findings. Since this effect is to some degree inevitable, it’s important to acknowledge it and explain what was done to minimise it.

There was certainly scope for my position as researcher-supporter to influence the results of the participant observation. As a native of the city in which this research took place, study participants may have relied more on me to problem-solve than on each other. This unintended effect may have caused study participants to not seek each other out as much for informal support as they may have had I not been present, thus, depriving the study from a fuller perspective regarding study participants’ capacity to form social connections with each other. They may have been more motivated to widening their social networks with nearby others had they not been able to turn to support staff members to address certain practical issues. From this perspective, the apparent apathy some displayed when it came to relating to others may have simply been a reflection of the fact that some felt that staff members could be far more effective as helpers in this situation than other residents with similar difficulties as their own.

There were also other aspects to consider that could significantly alter what was being observed, such as:

- Residents' awareness of the organisation's investment in this research;
- Residents' experience living in an institutional structure;
- Residents' perceptions of increased community reluctance to accept the presence of migrants due to the economic recession.

Regular consideration while conducting the participant observation of *resident-to-staff interactions*, *resident-to-resident interactions* and a general perception of what *resident-to-outer community interactions* might be like based on residents' interactions with staff members provided further clues of potential study participant reactivity in this research due to researcher presence and other relevant factors.

It was possible to distinguish resident-to-staff social interactions, including myself, by observing them in the course of a combination of formal and informal settings. On the formal level, the weekly all-house meeting involving both staff and residents was a good opportunity to observe this type of social interaction. Residents could participate actively in this regular meeting or opt to stay quiet throughout. On an informal level, it was possible to observe how study participants engaged with staff members they might come across spontaneously as they went about their day. For example, they could stay and engage in casual communication with the researcher or take off. They might even stay away from the emergency accommodation until the researcher had left the emergency accommodation at the end of the day, as another way of signalling their desire to not participate in this research.

As far as resident-to-residents social interactions are concerned, it was possible to observe study participants in a combination of structured and less structured

situations. A structured situation could be the weekly support group or focus group interview, and weekly group outings. Once again, study participants could choose to participate actively in these group gatherings or else adopt a passive role. If they did not wish to participate, they could also set up an external appointment at about the same time the meeting was going to take place or half way through the meeting to justify their absence. On weekends, they could sleep in if they did not wish to take part in the group outing. A less structured situation could be while they ate together at meal times, watched a TV programme while sitting in the living room or carried out their house chores.

The following are some observations regarding residents' social interaction patterns within each of these defined dimensions that highlight the potential impact of study participant reactivity on findings due to researcher presence and other relevant factors:

- *Resident-to-staff interactions:*
  - Quite possibly, and despite expressed consent to participate in this study, some residents may have felt more socially-inhibited in my presence based on suspicions that I might be an infiltrated controller on behalf of the migrant support organisation and, possibly also, immigration authorities.
  - Some residents may have also appeared more vulnerable while at the emergency accommodation as part of a survival strategy intended to gain increased individual attention from staff members.
  - Conversely, other residents could have displayed more engaging social behaviour while I was present with a sense that they might otherwise be deprived of certain benefits offered by the researcher and the organisation in exchange for their greater participation.

- Some residents may have preferred to relate more with members of the staff team than with their peers, considering them more trustworthy and capable of helping them.
- Some residents may have adopted certain social behaviours in my presence in hopes that I would advocate for their particular needs at higher echelons of authority.
- *Resident to resident interactions:*
  - Some residents may have been reluctant to mix with flatmates in this particular setting, considering them similarly deprived and, therefore, unable to provide meaningful support. In their vulnerable condition, they might even be exploited by flatmates.
  - Some could simply prefer to emphasise their privacy while living in an overcrowded flat.
  - Well aware of the fact that they would be relocating sooner or later, some may have felt disinclined to develop a sense of community in this temporary location.
- *Resident to outer community interactions:*
  - Those residents that more often stayed back at the flat may have been more inclined to spend time in the community had it not been for their fear of arrest and deportation in the current climate of increased restrictions on migrant movements.
  - Perhaps, some residents were slower at reaching out to available community-based resources that might prove useful in their current condition knowing they had someone from the local population to orient them at the flat.

A number of different methodological adjustments were made to reduce the impact of reactivity on findings. To start out with, the non-intrusive approach adopted in this study and the five-month duration of the fieldwork certainly favoured a reduction of potential reactivity. By consistently adopting a non-imposing stance during this lengthy period, i.e. letting residents either ignore or approach me according to their personal wishes, it was possible to reduce the sense some could have that I served a controlling function. Those who might have expected further individual attention by withdrawing were obliged to be more forthcoming if they wished to receive my support. Otherwise, they remained on the margins. Residents that connected easily with me from the outset eventually realised they had nothing more to gain from this interaction than what was initially announced by way of possible support. The weekly support group served as a safe communal meeting point where residents could be more themselves and, therefore, show their usual social interaction patterns. Weekend group outings in the community were intended to normalise residents' feelings about moving about outdoors and helping them recognise useful alternative resources they might wish to reach out to on their own.

Still, adjustments made had varying effects on different residents and, therefore, findings may, inevitably, reflect the impact of reactivity to a certain degree.

### **7.3.1. Limitations of the thesis**

The thesis sought to learn about social issues affecting undocumented migrants' psychosocial wellbeing while being conscious of the fact that members of these socially disadvantaged groups are generally hard to reach. It was only possible to envisage this type of research because (following the contraction of their available social networks) study participants had to leave their established living arrangements in peripheral city areas and turn towards emergency accommodations located within the central districts of Barcelona. After that, it was a question of

negotiating access to the emergency accommodation with administrative staff in charge of the overall operation. Still, there were no assurances that hostel residents would participate in this study to the degree that was necessary to draw substantial qualitative data required to answer the research questions, given their high level of circumspection. In anticipation of this difficulty, it was important to adopt a highly flexible and non-intrusive investigative approach that reduced study participants' defensiveness.

The implementation of the participant-observer approach to data collection was found to be useful for this purpose, as it provided a means to engage in cooperative relationships with study participants as necessary to elicit a minimum level of trust between researcher and those being researched. Although a stronger reliance on observational and group interactive data collection methods had its limitations, in terms of not being able to collect more in-depth individual information, this approach was effective as far as being able to capture social dynamics within the group without creating further stress in study participants' lives. The selected research site did not fulfil the basic requirements to conduct individual interviews in an appropriate manner, given the lack of privacy at the emergency accommodation, high level of suspiciousness displayed by different residents, and consequent social monitoring carried out by peers. The fact that thirteen out of fourteen residents accepted to take part in the Propensity to Trust Survey at the conclusion of the fieldwork period suggests that they had found some accommodation with the selected approach to research.



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## **Appendices**

Sample of field notes

Initial encounters at Emergency Accommodation

### **February 5<sup>th</sup> 2010**

Visit to ACISI's flat. Met Fa. and Mon., whom I hadn't met on previous visits. Sat in two intake interviews conducted by Man. These were young Senegalese migrants who had arrived in Canary Is. back in 2006 aboard a dinghy. They both had in-country contacts upon arrival. However, these contacts are now no longer available. They have gone elsewhere for employment purposes during the present economic downturn, as their legal residence permits allow, even back to their country of origin, as what they receive in unemployment benefits will go farther back home.

Consequently, those they were housing, like these Senegalese youngsters, who don't have legal papers, can't continue living were they were living until now. They are sleeping on the street or close to it and seeking alternative housing arrangements with little or no money because they barely get by with the little they make with scarcely available work. This is what has brought them to ACISI'S flat.

The separation from key contact people at a point where they still haven't normalized their situation has to be considered an important factor in their lives. It used to be that if an African crossed another one that was clearly homeless, he would offer to house him for whatever time was needed. This isn't happening anymore, or at least not as frequently. The other point is that guests have to contribute something to the household expenditures and if they don't have a job, many aren't welcome to stay.

So, now there are indeed fewer new migrant arrivals, but those who arrived years ago and still haven't obtained legal residence papers, are suffering the impact of the economic downturn, without the possibility of going elsewhere for lack of permits and definitely not back home, something they would otherwise never consider doing without the possibility of returning to Europe after risking their lives to get here. These are now requesting emergency shelter in the flats that were previously filled by migrant newcomers. There is an agreement with Barcelona's city hall to provide them this service. It only lasts three months, after which they need to have found a different living arrangement. I should reflect this changed situation in my revised proposal.

I learned that the flat has a set of rules each resident is expected to abide by and if he commits 6 faults within a given month, he's out. There are also faults that are so serious that a resident could be expelled immediately. Each resident is assigned certain chores. They all must attend a general meeting on Wednesdays and do general cleaning on Thursdays. They are expected to leave the flat by 10 am to "manage on their own", which means attending training courses, working or seeking employment. This means there'll be nothing to do at the flat proper during working hours unless it isn't office work, which I don't expect to have to deal with. I guess this means meeting them primarily in the afternoon-evening hours, if not accompanying some during the day to assist them with different bureaucratic procedures.

I was invited to stay for lunch and I accepted the invitation. Ate a Senegalese rice dish. I ended this visit by discussing with Mane my interest in getting together with Fa. and Mam. to discuss my specific responsibilities as a volunteer and the days and hours I would be needed most. I also took advantage of this opportunity to

explain how I would be approaching the research in the context of this volunteer position. This seemed to agree with his approach.

### **February 8<sup>th</sup> 2010**

Sat in meeting between ACISI administrative staff (Ra. Fa., Man.) and representatives of Accio Social i Ciutadania/Dept. D'Atencio a Persones Vulnerables. The purpose of this meeting was to explain the program to these representatives and clarify potential avenues of future collaboration. This was an opportunity to hear the overall program explained in greater depth and understand where there might be most need for intervention.

In relation to my research, Ra. pointed out that the advantage in working with the Sub Saharan migrant population, which has been hardly problematic, is that their internal solidarity is quite strong. However, because of this, they may also be more dependent than migrants from other ethnic origins. They rely more heavily on available external aid to meet their basic needs than possibly other migrants. This would be critical if now that internal solidarity is weakening owing to the economic crisis. Until now, many migrants had scattered employment opportunities but now they have none, which means they can't contribute to household expenses as they are expected to by those that host them and, therefore, might lose their placement. This is accompanied by extreme sense of pressure. Sometimes, it's the established migrant who moves away to take up a job opportunity elsewhere, which leaves the migrant without legal residence on the street. It'll be interesting to note what other kinds of resources they access in order to build their social networks at a moment when their existing ones break down.

It might be the best moment to work with undocumented migrants because now the flux of incoming migrants has stabilized and one can approach those who are

already here whose situation remains very unstable. Were new migrants arriving continuously as before, it might be a bit more chaotic. There certainly is no lack of migrants requesting support, so it's not like the fact that few newcomers are arriving is going to affect the numbers in this study.

ACISI has focused its support to migrant newcomers on provision of basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing, basic orientation, accompaniments, referrals) while attempting to connect them as quickly as possible with those established contacts they intended to reach upon arrival or else connect them with established migrants who are willing to take them in for a period of time. They succeeded in this way to place many migrant newcomers but as already noted, some of these placements have become untenable, due to lack of income-generating opportunities for many of these migrants who are still undocumented after several years, or simply because the migrants who were hosting them have moved away to a different location during the present economic crisis – another context, even back home in some cases. This has caused hosted migrants to return to the temporary shelter.

ACISI currently has a capacity to house 15 residents, of which 10 are adult residents who can remain for a period of up to 3 months. Their housing is funded by the IRPF program. They receive these requests via referrals from a number of agencies they are connected with, including the Immigrant Detention Centre. It has kept 5 places open for youth at the request of local authorities who have terminated their placements in child protection programs once they determined that they had turned 18 years old, despite these youngsters' claims to the contrary. They simply don't want them to roam the streets in absence of other supports. The representative of Accio Social noted that some of these youths are falling into delinquency and expressed particular concern for them, since they aren't easy to manage once they've reached that point. Perhaps not related to this, but she enquired about how



many more residents ACISI could take in. Ra. kept firm in the idea that the limit was 15, to avoid problems associated with overcrowding. It's already tight as it is.

We agreed at a meeting that followed this meeting that I would focus particular attention on these youths, given their present vulnerability. This might be an adequate way to get started. An entry point.

One of ACISI's main concerns at this time is the situation of migrants who are currently residing in storage naves or who are squatting in empty apartments that are devoid of electricity, water, etc. Ra. noted that this situation of extreme pressure is causing many to feel like they're losing control. This might be an additional population segment to keep in mind. Accio Social is carrying out some limited interventions for homeless individuals in these areas and thought there might be a possibility for future collaboration.

This meeting helped to clarify the different groups and their current locations, and how ACISI is responding to each. They have limited their support package to basic emergency assistance but may consider establishing lines of collaboration with other agencies to supplement their basic package. I guess they expect that my presence might help to address some of the mental health issues that arise.

### **February 9<sup>th</sup> 2010**

Went to ACISI flat at 4 pm and stayed until 8 pm, as I was told this was the period of the day when most residents were back from their day's activities. Some were still away but I was able to interact with La, from Casamance, Sou. from Morocco, Mam. from Senegal, Ab. from Ghana, and there was another very quiet fellow, quite withdrawn from Ghana who I greeted but don't remember his name now. We watched some TV, I accompanied Sou. while he did the evening cooking, but then

spent more time speaking with La. He shared with me his experience of feeling so pressured with his situation that, in certain instances, he was paying no attention to his surroundings and almost got ran over by a car. Quite sad for a kid that is only 24 and is a good kid. He had contacted his father to let him know of his wish to return but his father told him to stay on a bit longer. I guess there comes a point where whatever you felt back home appears far better than what you're feeling at present. At least, he didn't have to worry about covering his basic survival needs. People leave their country of origin not so much because it's impossible to go on living there but because they want to improve the quality of their lives and think that's impossible in their home country. And yet, what they come to realize in this context is that their lives have lost quality, due to the conditions they are subject to. They hold on with the hope that their situation will eventually change. If there's anywhere where they could possibly improve their situation, it's here, not there. They also see others like them that have made it so they tell themselves: why not me too?

### **March 26<sup>th</sup> 2010 (Weekly support group)**

Today, I went in just before 3pm for the weekly support group. I had lunch first. It was a bit past three by the time we got started but others were having lunch too. Some started to point out that it was time to get started if we were to finish by 4pm. They're very conscious of time. A few approached me to say they had to leave by 3.30. Although they say they have an appointment, some don't have a way of justifying it. The message seems to be that they're willing to participate for half the meeting in order to not collect a fault by non-attendance. Half-way through the meeting, several had taken off, which was quite distracting for those that remained.

I don't think many concede much importance to this type of meeting so far. It's like their entire focus is set on finding work, by applying to jobs left and right, carrying

out the courses they're involved in, and anything else has less immediate importance. They don't feel at ease with the idea of discussing their life experiences in front of each other. I felt there was a real resistance in this regard. They haven't acknowledged that they can gain something from supporting each other. That's the point I have to bring them to, and show them ways they can do that.

With those that did stay through the meeting, which happened to be the ones that are generally more willing to engage with others, I think I did manage to drive home the idea that if they want to achieve what they've set out to achieve by coming here, social contacts are essential, and especially in their situation, where they lack documents and the economic crisis has diminished prospects of quick employment. We discussed the need to find ways to establish new contacts but also what may get in the way of that. Several communicated the fact that they felt that Spaniards were racist, which reflects the fact that their negative perceptions about the autochthonous population, growing out of lived experiences, doesn't make them inclined to seek these types of contacts. There's too much fear of rejection. Too much distrust. Although they acknowledge the importance of contacts, they don't know how to go about this. As a result, they are in a temporary shelter, with few if any outside contacts.

This is the heart of my research. What opportunities exist in this context for migrants to establish new social contacts? What resources do migrants carry with them that might facilitate the establishment of these necessary social contacts? What interferes in their ability to establish these contacts? How can they possibly get around this?

In future support groups, I need to help them map available resources in their surrounding environment that may serve to establish social contacts, and clarify

what they themselves can offer to establish these necessary links. What it will require from them, whether they have it or not. We can then clarify what gets in the way and how to get around it. Further ahead, I can assess how they are availing themselves of these opportunities for social linkages.

#### **April 14, 2010**

- General atmosphere

Quiet, relaxed atmosphere. Everyone seems to be doing his thing. Some are eating, watching TV, others are sitting around, chatting with each other. Waiting for the weekly, all-resident meeting.

- Major and minor events

Held the weekly meeting. Started out on a positive note, introducing a new resident from Liberia, Am. only 17 years of age. Continued with mention that Spanish classes will be available at the shelter as of next week, twice a week, for all residents who wish to participate, and this time, the classes will stress reading and writing, since most have acquired basic speaking skills by now. Several won't be able to attend since they are taking classes elsewhere. I stressed the fact that the weekly support group is also a context in which they can practice their conversational skills. The only negative point concerned their excessive use of chocolate powder and sugar. Supplies have to last longer than they do and pouring a large quantity with milk and sugar is also unhealthy for them. This might provide an indication of what some might do to keep their spirits high at this time. Towards the end of the meeting, Sa. mentioned that this might be his last meeting, since he is planning to leave. His time at the flat is also running out. He mentioned he might try to cross the border into France unnoticed. He just hasn't found any kind of job here except for distributing leaflets for a dance club in town. At the very end of the meeting, Am. enquired about how he will know if he has broken a rule. It was suggested that he review the forms

he was given upon entry in the home. He had also not met me yet, and, therefore, asked who I was. I introduced myself and let him know I had lived in his country for a period of time. That excited him.

- Interactions among study participants

I don't perceive any tensions among current residents. They all seem to be quite at ease with each other. They seem free to interact with each other. They certainly don't avoid each other. There might be some unease with regards to the dorm master, Mam., since they know he is always observing what is going on and will bring it up any observed oddities at some point. He is also the one that can catch them breaking a rule and will inform the administrators who will give them a fault.

- Interactions between study participants and researcher

After the meeting, and since Sa. might be leaving shortly, I carried out an individual interview with him concerning his satisfaction level with the overall service, at administrators' request. His general feeling was that it had gone as well as he could expect in a place like this one.

As soon as I became available once again to the rest of the residents, Us. asked me for the lap top to consult job vacancies. He also wants to connect with Facebook. I had promised to let Sou. check first but I didn't see him around so I handed it to him. Then, Sou. came out of the shower area and reminded me he had asked for it. I had to apologize for that and asked Us. to speed it up and let Sou. use it. Us' attitude towards Sou., half-jokingly, was to tell him to get lost. He came out with the argument that Sou. hardly knows how to navigate on internet, and Sa. supported him with that. They seemed to be poking fun at him but in a way that was embarrassing him and caused him to defend himself. It really seemed like he was hording it to himself and didn't care about how Sou. felt about it. It was kind of

childish. Since the action was done and I wasn't going to pull it out of Us' hands nor insist on him passing it on to Sou., I assured Sou. that tomorrow it would be his first.

Mo. also dropped in. He hadn't attended the meeting. He showed me a letter in which he is required to attend a court meeting on April 19<sup>th</sup> at which they will inform him if his application for legal documents has been successful. Regardless of outcome, he will probably be offered another shelter placement but with a residence permit, this might be in a flat. He doesn't seem to be worried about his unemployment status although he'd like some money. He plays football with a local team.

I hadn't seen Abd. in several days but today he attended the meeting. He mentioned afterwards that he found a 4-day job painting an apartment with a friend of his.

- Subjective experience

I feel quite integrated in the group at this stage. There are some residents that keep distances but that appears to be a pattern in relation to others as well. They are barely communicative, hardly engaging, although not conflictive for that matter. The lap top provides an opportunity to connect and develop some informal conversations. Most have found some utility in that.

I was a bit uncomfortable with Us'. half-kidding attitude towards Sou., denying him the possibility of checking his email because he was intensely involved in his own search. I calmly suggested to Us to let him use it as well but when he kept on going as usual, I didn't insist and instead agreed with Sou. that he'd be the first person tomorrow.

### **May 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 (Outing to Zoo)**

- General atmosphere

Group in good mood. Ha. was up making sandwiches for everyone when I arrived shortly after 9 am. Others took care of ensuring that other logistics were in place for the outing. Some were eager to take off in time to be there at the park's opening and were getting rather impatient with some members' delay, who were still having breakfast. Finally, we all walked over together to the park's entrance, arriving shortly after the opening. The day was a bit cloudy but that was to our advantage, as it prevented sun exposure during the walk. This visit, as I soon found out, wasn't only going to be an opportunity to view some curiosities for them but, more especially, to take pictures. Fortunately, I had brought my camera along. They took 251 pictures in total. The park was quite crowded, which contributed a sense that the activity they were involved in was quite popular among all age groups.

The group split up for a while and I thought that was good, because it gave them a sense that they were free to go at it as they pleased. Eventually, we came back together naturally as a group. There was no further attempt to split up. They were finding it funner this way. Everything went very smoothly. No hassles whatsoever. Some expressed interest in working at the zoo. I asked an employee how to submit a job application and he was kind enough to give us the address. We had seen everything by 3 pm so at that time, we returned home.

- Study participants' behaviours

Participants behaved very appropriately for the circumstance. They didn't call negative attention onto themselves at any moment. They were sociable and involved in the subject matter, making interesting questions about the animals and the park's set up. Although some group members went off together at the start, they then came back together and shared the remaining time in the group. It seemed like they recognised an opportunity for some group fun and went all out for it in the end.

Back at the shelter, they went back to their usual interactional style. This shift would signal that being at the shelter has an influence on their way of relating to others.

- Study participants' reactions

Most had never been in a similar park before, so they were quite impressed at the variety of animals available for viewing. They wanted their pictures taken at every turn. They were fascinated with the small vehicles which one can rent to tour the park. They had their pictures taken at the steering wheel with their sunglasses on. Quite likely, the idea was to send these pictures back to family and friends at home to show that they were doing well. This would feel encouraging to their relatives and friends.

- Subjective experience

I felt this was a good opportunity to extend our relationships beyond the shelter and experience each other's company in a different way, with less pressure. If it went well, as I think it did, it would help consolidate growing trust in my role as volunteer staff member. Residents might suggest further outings in a similar vein and gradually come together as a more tight-knit group. I felt comfortable walking around with them although I did notice people looking on, probably wondering who we all were. Quite likely, they noticed that too but it didn't seem to disrupt anything.

### **May 28<sup>th</sup> 2010**

The event that frames today's exchanges is the weekly group session.

During the introductory individual check-ins, Mo. raised the issue of lack of trust preventing open sharing with some group participants. I took advantage of his cue to raise further discussion on this topic, by asking pertinent questions regarding trust. The group's passionate response to this subject is indicative of the fact that trust is



an issue they are all grappling with at this time. It was hard to contain and channel individual in-puts. Everyone was trying to voice their opinion over someone else's.

In general, most expressed weariness about the possibility of trust. It wasn't something that could occur naturally. They had to approach it with caution. On one hand, you had some saying that if you can't trust anyone completely, it's not worth trying to establish any degree of trust. "If I can't even trust my mother entirely, how am I going to trust someone else? It's better to place entire trust in God." On the other hand, you had others who were weary because their trust had been broken in past relationships. Several group members shared personal stories in this regard.

However, there was also admission to the fact that, although no one is perfect, some level of trust is necessary to get on in life. Only that different people deserve a different degree of trust. The only way of making the difference is by opening oneself up to the possibility of establishing a trusting relationship and then seeing what happens.

It appears like several are not willing to try it out for fear of getting hurt.

In summary, it would seem like several feel that authentic human trust is impossible and, therefore, don't invest much effort in cultivating trusting relationships. They only trust in God. However, others do acknowledge the importance of establishing trusting human relationships and feel it's possible but at different levels, depending on the individual. They admit that in order to establish a safe degree of trust, it's necessary to "try out" the relationship – see to what extent the other is truly trustworthy.

I pointed out that unless one approaches new relationships with basic trust, these are unlikely to occur, and one may miss the opportunity to establish trusting

relationships. I also pointed out that unless one practices trust in relationships, this ability may fall into disuse and affect future relationships.

- Who didn't seem to profit from the group's discussion?

It seems like Em. didn't really connect with the group after he was duly introduced to the group for the first time. He was initially curious about what the group was about and I tried to get different group members to explain it. No one contributed anything, which was an indication that they haven't totally embraced or understood what the group is about themselves. I provided some initial clues. However, after he confirmed his basic understanding, he seemed to cut into others' expressions and the response was negative. He took off prior to the end of the meeting with the excuse that he had an appointment. I think the younger ones have a harder time being respected.

#### Summary

Clearly, trust is a tentative thing for many migrant residents. It doesn't come easy to them. They have high consideration for it but don't believe it's quite possible. Some are willing to venture out (stick their neck out a bit), acknowledging that they can't do without it, but approach it cautiously.

## Coding structure

A. Code heading: CF – Contextual factors

- Study participants are found in a situation of destitution consequent to inability to remain employed during the economic downturn and loss of informal social networks that provided essential support.
- Study participants are obliged to seek room and board in public network of emergency shelters, which are overcrowded. Lack of privacy.
- Study participants need to relocate after 3 months since admission to the emergency shelter is on a time-limited basis. Some have already been to several different shelters.
- Study participants are trapped in dilated bureaucratic procedures to obtain legal resident permits.
- Study participants are exposed to prolonged dependency on public assistance as a result of their unremitting destitute condition.

B. Code heading: PBSC – Potential barriers to social connection

- Sense of helplessness in some. “Not much we can do about it at this time” type of attitude, leads to their greater passivity/uncertainty.
- Growing frustration over having to live bunched together with others, with little privacy. No desire to hang out all the time with the same people one shares one’s living space with.
- Sensitivity to others’ negative perceptions about oneself due to prolonged dependency on public assistance. Fear of rejection.
- Narrowed focus on livelihood issues. Emphasis on living up to self-imposed and family’s economic expectations. May also need to pay off debts contracted to pay for trip to Europe. “One is continually thinking about financial problems.” Everything else is secondary.
- Fear of arrest and deportation over the lack of legal residence permit and frustration when successive applications are turned down, results in greater emphasis placed on obtaining legal documents. Sense that everything else will fall adequately in place once this issue is resolved.
- Prioritization of economic concerns leads to privileging social contacts that might help resolve practical needs and undervaluing other types of possible relationships, like those nearby who are found in similar situation.
- No opportunity to enjoy leisure time anyway, being penniless. That will become possible once one can afford to go out with friends.
- Embarrassment at not having what it takes to maintain an adequate social life, i.e. money. Money is essential to maintain social contacts and without money, no social contacts. Difficulty to engage in social interaction where others have the ability to spend and they don’t.
- Hesitation about forming close relationships with others whom one might not be able to sustain contact with in the near future due to anticipated relocation.

- Since opportunities are scarce and those in immediate surroundings are all out for the same thing, it's best to keep to oneself, lest someone else gets ahead first.
- Preference to take leave from others after exhausting daily search for solutions.
- Have enough dealing with one's own problems. Lack of motivation to deal with others' problems that might be similar to one's own.
- Inclination to appear self-reliant in order to show a strong façade in front of others.
- Resistance to open up to others about one's situation in a residential setting where they lack sufficient privacy.
- Avoidance of reminders of difficult memories that might arise in the course of relationships with others having gone through similar experiences while still in unstable condition.
- Constantly on the move/rushed for solutions. Lack of regular routines to structure social life.
- Near exclusive dependency on same-ethnic group for support prior to destitution or on public services if the study participant who has recently become of age was previously housed in a youth support programme. Consequent lack of go-betweens outside this limited circle of social contacts to facilitate new social connections. Must now fend for oneself. This represents a major adaptation.
- Perception of autochthonous population as distant, hard to reach, unlike what it was like to meet people in country of origin. They encounter barriers to social interaction that are difficult to overcome with the kinds of personal resources they have traditionally relied upon to establish social relationships.
- Past social experiences at similar shelters may have been positive or negative and influence the way study participants interact with each other in their current life setting.
- Introversion/extroversion.
- Ways of grieving over loss.
- Previous level of community involvement.
- Accessibility of available social resources in life setting.
- Available personal skills and prospects to use them.
- Level of acquired orientation regarding available opportunities to pursue personal interests, e.g. transfer acquired skills, find jobs, meet like-minded people.
- Insufficient knowledge of local language.

C. Code heading: ASR – Available social resources

*Shelter-based*

- Shared housekeeping duties, i.e. cleaning, cooking.
- Peer leaders.
- Common interest in football, music, beach, web-based social networks, learning local languages.
- Communication technology to keep in touch with family and friends, e.g. email, FB, Skype, cell phones.

- Opportunities for mutual aid, e.g. hair-cutting, computer learning.
- Support group.
- In-house language tutoring.

*Community-based*

- Nearby job orientation resource center for district residents.
- Migrant associations.
- Nearby mosque.
- Leisure opportunities
- Language learning lessons
- Vocational training opportunities
- City/district public events, e.g. national celebrations, marathon, etc.
- Local university departments, interested in migration, cultural issues.

D. Code heading: IS – Individually-based resources (mediating social connection)

- Proactive approach
- Educational level
- Familiarity with available social resources
- Natural sociability
- Developed social skills
- Acknowledgement of value of social relationships
- Admission of need for social support
- High concept of social solidarity
- High tolerance for risk-taking
- Previous level of community involvement
- Ability to cope with loss
- Determination to succeed
- Openness to innovate
- Self-confidence
- Optimism
- Trust

E. Code heading: RI – Risk factors (mediating social connection)

- Heightened sense of self-vulnerability
- Fear of betrayal/ambivalence about others' trustworthiness
- Increased social inhibition due to fear of rejection
- Low concept of social solidarity
- Difficulties coping with loss
- Sense of detachment
- Cultural patterns of dependency
- Learned passivity as a result of prolonged dependency
- Rigidity

- Demoralization
- Sense of helplessness
- Despondency
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of self-confidence
- Pessimism
- Distrust

F. Code heading: PPT (Positive propensity to trust)

- "Some level of trust is essential to get on in life."
- "One must modulate trust depending on the person's proven trustworthiness"
- "One has to at least try to establish a trusting relationship with others and see what happens."
- "Most people are easy to deal with."
- "People are generally upright."

G. Code heading: NPT – Negative propensity to trust

- Trust is not a given. Heightened cautiousness. "Better not stick your neck out too much."
- "You can't trust any human being one hundred percent so it's not worth trying to establish any degree of trust with anybody except God."
- "Everyone is looking out for his own interest, to get ahead."
- "No one does anything for free."
- "Others can easily let you down, or even betray you. They can get to know you and then you use that information against you."
- "Competition is better than cooperation."
- "Self-reliance is better."



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ASSOCIACIÓ PER LA COOPERACIÓ, LA INSERCIÓ SOCIAL I LA INTERCULTURALITAT

## CURRICULUM VITAE

ACISI is a non profit association, established in 1999 to work in the field of the Migration. ACISI's targets are to promote the awareness of the real situation of the Migrants in Catalonia, to try to make possible their social and labour integration and to co-operate with the development of the countries generating Migration.

ACISI's aims are:

- To pay a specific attention to the reception, to the training and to the social and labour integration of the Migrants and Refugees in Catalonia.
- To contribute to mutual knowledge and good relations between the Migrant population and the receiver society.
- To co-operate with both the economic and social development of the countries of origin of the Migrant population.
- To promote carrying out surveys/research on the living and working conditions of both Migrants and Refugees in Catalonia.


Its main work is to manage and mobilize Territory Plans for the Migrants integration. Its main activities are:

- Mobilisation of the Regional Plan for the Insertion of Migrants of the Baix Empordà (Girona). 1999-2002
- Research "Economic Migration in the Region of Baix Empordà" (Girona). April 2000
- Mobilisation of the Regional Plan for the Insertion of Migrants of the Baix Ebre (Tarragona). 2001-2003
- Technical co-ordination of Intercultural Mediation Service (IMS) of the Baix Empordà (Girona). 1999-2002
- Elaboration and conduction of the projects 'Apropem nos' (training for experts) and "Linata Arrai" (cultural activities from an intercultural point of view for the whole population). 2001-2002
- Seminar "Methodological Elements to improve the work with the Migrant Population" for health professionals of the Caring Consortium of the Baix Empordà. 2002
- Course "Islam and the Local World" for experts and politicians of the region. 2002
- Research "The foreign Migration in the Baix Ebre" (Tarragona). May 2002
- Course "Communication and Intercultural Negotiation" for social agents and workers of personal care services. 2001

Participation in the project "Combating social exclusion of ethnic minorities and immigrant communities through culture", funded by the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion for the years 2004-2005, and led by the Regional Development Agency of the Cycladic Islands.

### New Courses

- "El procés de mediació: l'art de la transformació i de la permanència" (training for experts). Barcelona June-July 2004.
- "Les dues mirades" (cultural activities from an intercultural point of view for the whole

GES  Gabinet d'Estudis Socials



Queen Margaret University  
Institute of International Health and Development  
Edinburgh, Scotland

Barcelona, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2010

To whom it may concern,

Regarding field work being carried out at ACISI in Barcelona, Spain, by researcher Keven E. Bermudez during the year 2010 as part of his PhD work in Health Sciences,

And regarding your request for an independent contact person in the field,

Mr. Xavier Vallvé Duaigües, as social studies researcher and secretary of Gabinet d'Estudis Socials (GES), will be pleased to answer questions and to be of aid in consultations from Mr. Bermudez's thesis supervisors at Queen Margaret University.

Most sincerely,

  
Xavier Vallvé Duaigües

Secretary,

Gabinet Estudis Socials



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